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Introduction

Rolinda Rochlin Schonwald

Bridging Heaven and Earth

The Memoirs

of

Rebbetzin Chana Twersky Rottenberg

as told to

Rolinda Rochlin Schonwald

Introduction

by

Rolinda Rochlin Schonwald

When my friend, Rebbetzin Chana Twersky Rottenberg, asked me to help her write her memoirs, little did I know I would wrap the garment of her remarkable life around me, absorbing her wisdom, courage and grace. In all the time I have known her, she was always "the Rebbetzin," part of a beautiful, princely Rabbinic couple. Now that I have sat with her and listened to her memories, I have also come to know her as a young girl, as a holocaust survivor, as a businesswoman and a bride, as a mother, a scholar and a widow.

It has been a great honor to embark on this endeavor. In the time of her bereavement and sorrow, Chana turned to me for help in writing her memoirs. The project gave her a way to frame her life, to put the rich spiritual legacy she embodies into perspective. It gave me an opportunity to taste the living history of her life, to shape it into accessible form.

Here is a Hasidic court seen through the eyes of a woman born into a unique world that once was the crown of Jewish mystical life. Chana's story chronicles her experiences during the ghastly nightmare which vanquished her world, and the untold account of what happened in Transnistria, where the bulk of Rumania's Jews were deported and died. You will meet people whose lives she saved. Her forthright and decisive heroism is modest and matter-of-fact in the telling. Her faith is inspirational. Every moment, for her, is an example of what it means to live a life imbued with holiness. "Every day we have an opportunity to renew the miracle of creation," she says. "In every moment the possibility is there."

She treats everyone she meets with enthusiastic respect. "If you bring one soul back to the right path, it's as though you conquered the whole world," she

maintains. Life is too short to waste time being judgemental, angry, or calling "others" names.

The *sinas chinam* (causeless hatred) which divides people so bitterly is anathema to this gentle woman, whose friendships span the full range of humankind.

Look at the way she speaks to people. "Hello, my beloved boy," she says to "her" taxi driver who has taken her cuckoo clock for repair. Everyone she encounters is treated with utmost respect and affection, whether they are religious or secular, wealthy or impoverished. "Speak nicely to everyone you meet," her Mama taught. "You never know whose soul you will lift up in the process." This philosophy was extended to servants and beggars, to relatives and friends. Is it any wonder that the Rebbetzin and her beloved husband, Rabbi Ephraim Asher Halevi Rottenberg z"l, were always loved and esteemed by the people from all walks of life who were privileged to know them?

We met twenty-three years ago, when I was in graduate school. Like countless other young people, I felt accepted and nurtured, adopted as one of their spiritual daughters. In time, the Rottenbergs hosted our engagement party, helped us plan and celebrate our wedding, and made *sheva brachot* on the Sabbath following it. Our babies were never named before consulting them. Visiting them was a highlight whenever we returned to Los Angeles.

While working on this project, the Rebbetzin and I spoke for hours. We traveled to the Dead Sea, where she delighted in finding unusual pods growing on a tree. As we sat in her Jerusalem apartment, she told me story after fascinating story. "I want each person mentioned in my memoirs to be a mensch, a real person," she insisted. "I want to bring out their unique qualities." Treading into the darkest moments of her life, she recounted incidents which she had previously never shared with anyone. Her memoirs are suffused with integrity and goodness.

How fortunate we are to be offered this glimpse into the world of her vanished Hasidic childhood, to hear what became of it during the war, and what happened when she attempted to recreate it in Los Angeles afterward.

May this slim volume of memories open a world of possibility to you, dear reader. May these portraits of Hasidic life enable you to see your own families with new eyes. Surely we have each been put into this world for a purpose. Part of that purpose is to touch one another's souls, to be agents of goodness and loving-kindness, to take care of one another, to bless each other.

The life of a Hasidic woman is often so occupied with attending to the needs of others that she has little time to think about herself and few opportunities to express the rich legacy which she has inherited. It is a blessing that Chana has made the time to share the treasures of her life with us.

Perhaps this book will inspire you to reflect upon your life or to help an aging relative or friend begin the "life review" process for harvesting the lessons of their life. Much wisdom is gained from this immensely rewarding work.

Jewish folklore describes the age of eighty as "entering the gates of wisdom." Chana generously shares her wisdom with us, nourishing our souls with the tale of her examined life.

When I asked Chana to whom she wanted to dedicate her book, she said "in memory of all those whom I lost." Sadly, the list is a long one.

"When my husband was on his deathbed," she told me, "he said that anything I do to perpetuate his name should also be done in memory of my first husband, Dr. Stein."

This generosity of spirit is a trait shared by both Chana and her husband. May the memory of all those she lost bless all who read about them.

Jerusalem
Lag B'Omer
May 14, 1998

Dedication

Dedicated to the blessed memory of all those whom I lost,
my parents, Rabbi Yitzhak Twersky and Rebbetzin Malka Frieda Twersky
my sister, Rivka Twersky
my brother, Shimon Twersky
my husbands
Rabbi Dr. Shimshon Stein
and
Rabbi Ephraim Asher Halevy Rottenberg
and
my friends

May all their memories be for a blessing.

Acknowledgements

Through the years, many dear friends have encouraged me to tell my story. Rachel Adler urged me to write "Recollections of a Rabbi's Daughter," which appeared in Davka Magazine and was reprinted elsewhere. Shoshana Gabbai patiently listened and typed my earlier reminiscences. My grand daughter, Alisa, taped many hours of discussion and memories.

After my beloved husband died, I realised that the time had finally come to tell the story of our life. I asked my dear friend, Rolinda Schonwald, whom I had the honor of bringing to the bridal canopy, to help me write my memoirs. We spent many hours together, sifting through the layers of memory. Rolinda's sensitive probing gently unleashed memories of events I hadn't thought about for decades. Now I am ready to harvest my life story. Thank you for sharing the journey with me.

Love Songs

I got used to singing to him, as he lay in his hospital bed, connected to a maze of tubes, monitors, and machines. A respirator to help him breathe. Feeding tubes to nourish him. His skin tone, incongruously rosy, giving an impression of health. Skin stretched taut over bones, his flesh already consumed. Becoming ethereal before my eyes, more spirit than matter.

Our visits were of necessity one-sided. He no longer spoke. Did he hear what was said? Did he recognize anyone? I didn't know. But in those months, as he lingered in a twilight zone between this world and the next, words of the ancient psalms came to me, and I sang to him as he once sang to me.

These were the songs my mother taught me from *Sefer Tehilim*, the Book of Psalms, words which were always on her lips as she prayed for those in need. These were the psalms we recited when praying for the sick and the dying to be healed. We who were powerless to help, without medicines, lacking food - we lived on hope, on trust, on prayer. "Trust in G-d," we sang, over and over, placing all our trust in the One who helps. The words of the holy psalms, written by King David so long ago, have sustained our people ever since. Songs for healing, prayers of praise. "I place my trust in the Lord."

Singing to my husband, I place my hand in his. I ask him questions. "Squeeze my hand if you love me." Sometimes I think I feel him responding, but I am never quite sure. Sometimes he struggles in distress against his confinement, his hands tied, lest he pull out the tubes. When he becomes agitated, the heart monitor displays erratic designs, and my own heart leaps wildly in my throat. Then he calms down again, and I resume my singing, feeling my pulse slow down as the words calm us both.

Ana El Na Refa Na Lah. As Moses prayed for his sister Miriam to be healed, so I petition on behalf of my beloved, willing him to return, with G-d's help, to health.

As I watch the face of my husband, peaceful and pure beneath a halo of white hair and beard, I cannot bring myself to say good-bye. We have been together

nearly half a century. He sent love letters with his gifts, bouquets of flowers for Shabbat, enhanced by the messages accompanying them. Letters I will always treasure, penned by his dear hand. "These flowers will wilt," he wrote, "but my love for you will never, ever end."

My friends call or send messages by fax. They come to the hospital, bearing memories and prayers, kind words of concern, bundles of compassion. How would I get through this without them?

The final curtain stretches out like fine gauze, infinitely fragile in the twilight. A sudden, fierce wind could rend the fabric. Crises arise, demanding response. How do I make these decisions, authorising procedures to prolong his life, to ease his pain?

His hands, which caressed the soft, blond hair of our grand daughters in blessing and performed countless mitzvot, now lie still upon the hospital sheets, restrained with straps, to protect him. The pale skin of his hands on the white sheets is translucent, revealing a tangle of blue veins. His hands, with the tip of one finger missing, are no longer capable of winding the leather straps of faith around his head and his arm, fixing frontlets between his eyes. His mouth, softened into a childlike smile, seems relaxed, at peace. But I am not ready, will never be ready to say good-bye to this man, my husband, my companion, my beloved.

As I sit in his hospital room, remembering all those I lost without the possibility of saying farewell, I cannot imagine my life without him. They say all beginnings are difficult. They say that without thinking of the endings. Lives torn asunder.

My brother joins me, just as he was beside me when my first husband died. Aaron, who was with me throughout the war, returns in compassion.

This bedside vigil is a replay of that time long ago, when I became a widow with a newborn infant, facing an uncertain future. I watch the hazy memory float before my eyes as though it were a stage set softened by a theatrical scrim. Peering through the transparent curtain at the gently lit scene on the other side, I watch my husbands as they die.

Ephraim looks luminous as he is borne into the next world by the Angel of Death, *Malach Ha Mavet*, a mysteriously natural presence. My brother recites the *vidui* for him, his final confession, and sings *Shma Yisrael*. Ephraim dies with his eyes open, giving us something to do. Close his eyes. Open the window. Let his soul depart. A nurse comes in to turn off the machines. A doctor records the time of death. Quietly, they leave us alone. A stillness fills the room. The struggle to hold on is over. Suspended above this scene, I barely hear my brother whisper "*Baruch Dayan Ha Emet*," "Blessed is the True Judge."

"If I die in Los Angeles, bury me beside my parents," he made his wishes known. "And if in Jerusalem, then bury me in the Holy City."

And so he is buried in California, beside the tomb of his parents.

In the silent limousine which carries us behind his casket, I begin to sing to him. One last song, on our last trip together. The Song of the Partisans. I sing the song with different words, this melody, for my Ephraim.

Zog nit keinmol, az du gehst dem letzten veg...

Don't ever say that this is your last trip

The sky is blue but for me it is dark

Don't be afraid, I will follow you

My voice does not waver. The words of the song infuse me with strength. This song of the survivors, of those who remained here, on the earth which swallowed our loved ones.

Ephraim never spoke to me about his first wife and children, who were killed before he could bring them to America. Can you imagine? Some things between us were never spoken. Losses too great to bear, the expression of them unfathomable. Where could that discussion lead us in our midnight cries of woe?

After he died, I found a picture of a beautiful woman and two lovely little boys, in the drawer of his desk.

His crisis of faith, when he heard that they were dead. He thought he could never pray, never lay *t'filin* again. Their screams pierced his nightmares. He would not have been the first whose faith was broken by the Evil which befell our people.

Into the depths of his despair came the voice of his uncle, telling him, as Mama told me long ago: "Do not forget from whom you are descended. Never break the sacred, golden chain."

We built a life together, two broken people in the City of Angels, with birds of paradise in our back yard, and the word *ECHAD* written in the ironwork of our gate. The *Aleph* for Ephraim, *Chet* for Chana, for me, and *Daled* for David, our son. Also a jug, the jug of the Levites, to wash the hands of the priests before they bless the people. He adopted my son, giving him his name, and the blessing of having a father to raise him.

On Friday evenings, I light thirteen candles, for the numerical equivalents of our initials. One for *Aleph*, for Ephraim. Eight for *Chet*, for Chana. Four for *Daled*, for David. I light candles for the souls of the living and for the souls of the dead, the flames dancing together in praise of the One who created our world and then rested.

Now my husband rests beside his parents, who escaped the inferno in time, beneath a stone on which his life is summarized. Passages engraved on the stone proclaim the goodness of Rabbi Ephraim Asher Halevi Rottenberg.

I pray for strength to get me through each day. How can I imagine Sabbaths and holidays without him, Seder without him? Chanukah, Purim - when our home filled with guests, gladdening our hearts with their songs - alone? A small group always sitting opposite Ephraim's desk in his study, telling stories, singing Hasidic melodies, asking questions.

Now his study is empty, and the books, with his notes tucked inside on scraps of paper, remember the man who knew them all by heart. How vast the treasury of

knowledge which has departed the earth with him - the melodies and the stories, the history and the Torah teachings.

I am not the only one who mourns the loss of this great soul who touched so many lives. Those who came to him for his blessing, for his words of wisdom, for answers, for advice. I thank G-d for the people who reach out to me in my sorrow, for their everlasting compassion. My son, David and Harlene, his wife. My grand daughters, relatives and friends. They call to me and I answer. I answer but I am not really here. I seem to be living in the past, in the land of memories. This, then, is what they mean, may his memory be for a blessing.

The day we met, he serenaded me, softly crooning the songs my father used to sing, as we rode in a horse-drawn carriage through Forrest Park. The purple blossoms of the wisteria and the jackarandas blazed among the new-green leaves of the trees. My first American spring, soft and balmy, the air perfumed with honeysuckle and jasmine. Lulled by the rhythmic clop clop of the horse's gait, feeling the warmth of the late afternoon sun. My eyes are upon the face of the man who will become my husband, soft in the dappled sunlight as we ride beside the silvery blue ribbon of waterfront. A miracle to feel young again, to rediscover the innocence of springtime, and the possibility of love.

That is how I will always remember Ephraim, as he sang his way into my heart that afternoon. And so I sing to him, as I accompany him to his final resting place, "never say that you are going your last way."

Inside the book cover of his first gift to me, he wrote: "Our joy should last forever." If forever, then how can this be his final journey? How does our joy continue without him? Perhaps only in the memories, which comfort me as I relive them. I sink into them, feeling that he continues to be with me, in a mysterious manner transcending his death.

He always protected me, sparing me worry. It is only now, in retrospect, that I read the signs. At our last Passover Seder in Palm Springs, he already had a premonition that this Seder would be his last. "I'm not going to see Jerusalem again," Ephraim told me. He knew his health was failing. Sadly, he departed

this life with many regrets. "I'm sorry," he lamented near the end, when his voice was failing him, "that more people didn't come to hear what I have to say."

Ephraim never wrote his book. He wrote many fascinating, probing articles. He was consulted by eminent scholars regarding their work. Perhaps, for him, there was something too final about books. He feared his book could never capture the ongoing process of engaging in Torah learning. A holy imperative was implied in the sacred task of publishing a book, which should bring the reader to fathom the immense glory of G-d. Ephraim's scholarship spanned decades. As his understanding deepened, he continued to find new insights, the nuances of which could never be harnessed in print.

And so he left an unfinished symphony for me, filled with the songs we sang throughout the life we shared. The melodies of that symphony fill my heart, teaching and sustaining me, comforting me on my way.

The Notebook

The Shiva ends. The house empties of visitors. I walk through the rooms, feeling displaced. Drawn to his study, I enter. The books in the shelves are silent. The photographs of his ancestors on the wood-paneled wall stare down from the past. His chair beckons. Sitting, I run my hands along the polished desktop. I have never looked in the drawers of his desk. Never intruded upon his privacy. Now I feel uneasy, as I open the drawer. He is gone, but the space still seems to hold his presence.

Looking into the drawer of my husband's desk, I find a photograph of myself as a young woman. "My beautiful wife, Channele," he wrote on the envelope in his elegant script. A book on the desk bears one of his loving inscriptions: "To my beloved Chana, with boundless love."

I talk to my beloved as I sit in his chair, asking his advice. The answer comes in a *Bat Kol*, a still, small voice. Write. Write it all down. And so I go to the market and buy one of those ruled, spiral notebooks used by college students. I write, telling my husband how I miss him, sharing the news of my days. "Today I went to visit Celia, do you remember when we were in Spain..." I began the

notebook on Father's Day, remembering other Father's Days, when we were still together and David and Harlene used to come and visit with flowers and gifts. I cannot read from the notebook without weeping. It contains all the sorrows of my heart.

The notebook accompanies me on a cruise to Alaska. Describing the Northern Lights and the fjords, I wish he were seeing these sights with me.

Sometimes when I am davening, a phrase in a prayer seems to speak directly to me. This year, on Yom Kippur, during the afternoon Mussaf service, I found: "Comfort the widow." Staying on that page, I read the psalm over and over again. It is as though King David wrote those words just with me in mind. I copy the prayer into my notebook, sharing it with my beloved.

Each morning, I pray to G-d for understanding and wisdom. Please, show me how to continue. I feel the imperative to perpetuate the memory of my husband, whose goodness and kindness blessed me for nearly half a century. I begin to journey down a long road of memories. Come, I will show you where it all began.

A Rebbe's Daughter Remembers: Childhood in a Hasidic Home

The world of my childhood was shaped by the Hasidic "*hoif*," in which I was raised. A *Hoif* is more than just a home. It is a whole world unto itself. Clustered around a central courtyard, the *hoif* was like a small, walled village whose main attraction was the Rebbe, the spiritual leader of the people. Since I grew up in an open city, our *hoif* consisted of only one house, on which many livelihoods depended.

In the Hasidic world, young, newly-married Rabbinic couples were sent to establish their own Hasidic centers throughout the cities, towns and villages of Eastern Europe. My parents, who married in Poland, arrived in the city of Beltz,

in the province of Bessarabia, Rumania, after World War I. Between the First and Second World Wars, we lived in a white-washed, stone house with a tin roof that clattered when it rained. I used to sit on the upstairs balcony and watch people coming down our tree-lined street on their way to visit my father, the Rebbe, or my mother, the Rebbetzin. Our home was larger than most, situated on a double lot near the bottom of the hill. It contained living quarters for our family, servants, and guests, and housed the synagogue as well.

A steady stream of visitors made their way to the broad veranda at the front of our home. They came to see my Father. As the Hasidic Rabbi of Beltz, he gave them advice and blessings, sustenance and hope. Climbing up the stairs to his office, they waited for him in the small anteroom, or crowded into our salon. When I returned home from school, I was always careful to be very quiet, never knowing who might be waiting at the top of the stairs to see the Rebbe.

My childhood was punctuated by the seasons, each with its special holiday memories. The focus of the week was the Sabbath, source of all our blessings.

A holy silence permeated our home when Mama lit the Sabbath candles. Her tiny hands covered her eyes, obscuring her tears. Mama never cried or prayed aloud. Her silence strengthened and sustained her, adding to the majesty of her presence. Kindling the Sabbath candles ushered in the serenity of Shabbat, the golden glow of candle light creating a home for the Sabbath Queen. We kissed, wishing each other "Good Shabbos." After my father and brothers left for the synagogue, we remained praying at the table upstairs. Not a whisper could be heard. It was as though the world, having put on a new face for the Sabbath, had come to a stand-still. The exquisite silence gently wrapped itself around us, soft as a sleeping infant's blanket, tenderly keeping us warm.

The Sabbath candles flickered as they danced, carrying our prayers heavenward. Seven candles, one for each member of our family, with an extra one to complete the mystical number of the days of the week. My sister and I each lit one candle as well. Watching the flames while waiting for the men to return for the Sabbath meal, we dreamt of the day when we would marry and

light two candles, adding another for each of our future children. Sitting beside the Sabbath candles, praying silently, our world seemed robed in holiness.

The entire week seemed to be spent preparing for the Sabbath. The *schochet* came every Wednesday to slaughter the chickens, leaving the cook and her helper to pluck the feathers. Mouth-watering aromas filled the kitchen. The sweet fragrance of freshly baked challahs mingled with the savory aromas of simmering soups and stews on the stove. Mama "took" a morsel of dough and burned it, her kitchen prayer recalling the ancient Temple sacrifices. The shiny, braided challahs graced our Sabbath table.

On Friday afternoon, the hectic pace of the work week abruptly ceased. The men returned wet and clean from the *mikvah*, purified by their immersion in the ritual bath. Singing Hasidic *niggunim*, their melodies filled the air. The holy Sabbath approached on the wings of those songs, which had been handed down through the generations, and which transported us into a spiritual realm bridging heaven and earth, transforming sorrow to joy. The melodies welcomed the Sabbath Queen and the angels; psalms rang out praising the Master of the Universe, Creator of all. I remember the voices of my father and grandfather, filling the synagogue and our home with ancestral tunes.

"A taste of the world to come," Mama would sigh in bliss, inhaling the aromas with the melodies. A mysterious look passed between my parents at the Sabbath table, as Father chanted "A Woman of Valour" to Mama, his Sabbath bride.

It has been many years since I lit Sabbath candles with my mother, long ago in Beltz, in the upstairs rooms of our *hoif*, as our Hasidic Rabbinical household was called. The memory of those moments enters my heart each time I bless the flames. I pause, transported to a time when the world seemed safe and all was well.

Each month, we celebrated the new moon, eagerly examining the sky as its slender form waxed full and then waned. I remember watching the men as they blessed the moon, standing on tiptoes and wishing each other *Shalom Aleichem*. Each holiday wove a unique strand into the rich tapestry of our life.

Memories are triggered while gazing at the calendar, planning menus, or praying from the siddur. A phrase will leap at me, the shofar's blast will pierce a half-remembered scene, or a melody will echo what once was.

I remember *tashlich* - the casting of sins upon the water - a New Year's event which drew all the Jews of Beltz to the riverside a forty-minute walk from the town. The children scampered ahead, enjoying the fresh air after long hours of synagogue prayers. Emptying our pockets of crumbs, we symbolically rid ourselves of our sins, praying to be inscribed for a good year in the Book of Life. The festive atmosphere, with children playing and people wishing each other Shana Tova, was a fitting beginning for the New Year.

During the Days of Awe, between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, when *selichos* penitential prayers were held in the middle of the night, Father's assistants dispersed throughout the town, knocking on doors and announcing the time to arise and confess our sins. Hearing the urgent summons, I snuggled back beneath the covers, thankful that girls were not obligated to attend the penitential service. In my bed, I could hear the shofar call at dawn.

Autumn in Bessarabia. A last, lingering taste of summer. The leaves of the trees turn golden, then orange, then brown. Walking to and from school, past the neighbor's laundry flapping on clotheslines strung between the trees, I scuff my feet through the carpet of crackling, dry leaves, their crisp smell a forecast of the harvest holiday upon us.

Just before the holiday of Sukkoth, while Father oversaw the building of the Sukkah booths, Mama made plum jam. My parents hired many extra hands to do the work. Strong men hauled boards around the house to the backyard, where their hammering frightened the chickens into noisy protest. Mama's helpers washed and hulled the plums, built the cooking fires, and plopped the ripe fruits into gigantic cauldrons, which they stirred as the jam thickened. Each autumn, Mama put up a thousand jars of the rich fruit preserves, to be given to the poor during the winter.

Another sukkah was built upstairs on the back balcony, which had a suspension pulley to lift the roof up for the week of Sukkoth. Father and the boys slept there beneath a roof of cut branches, a reminder of our journeys through the Sinai Desert in ancient days.

On Simchat Torah and Purim, when it is considered a mitzvah to get drunk, many bottles of wine were consumed. I remember the Gabbai bringing the Torah to the women's section so we could kiss the holy scroll, while the men danced and boys waved their apples and flags. During the last circle of dancing, my father, dressed in his silk robe and shtreimel, would dance alone, singing a special Chernobyl niggun, which had been passed down in our family for generations. He began the tune quietly, and soon everyone joined in.

*Tra la la la, la la la la, Tra la la , la la la, ay yay yi
ay ay ay yi ay ay yai
oy oy yoy, ay ay yay, oy yoy yoy.*

His song ran the gamut of human experience, from low tones of despair to lilting phrases of ecstasy. Everyone was entranced, watching as my father, the Rebbe danced. As the tune became familiar, they all joined into the wordless melody with fervor. My father raised his hands toward heaven. His Simchas Torah dance was beyond description. It was as though all that had ever happened and would happen were being revealed. Watching him from the women's section, I began to cry, without understanding why. His dance touched something inside me which I couldn't name. It was bigger than who I was.

Two weeks before Purim, Sarah, the cook busied herself in the kitchen with the baking of hundreds of *humantaschen*, three-cornered holiday cookies, stuffed with her special nut filling. The boys dressed up as King Ahashuerus, wicked Haman or righteous Mordechai. The girls wore crowns to be Queen Esther. Food parcels were given to all, and tzedakah was collected for the poor. During the reading of the Purim story, the boys sounded their *groggers* (noisemakers) to drown out the name of the evil minister, Haman, and the men drank until they could no longer distinguish between "blessed is Mordechai and cursed be Haman."

The first floor of my childhood home contained the synagogue, which served as a house of prayer and learning. Every evening, the men gathered for classes taught by my father or by one of the oldest learned men. Mama silently prayed each afternoon in the women's gallery, near the Passover kitchen. In the mornings, the women's section was the domain of Reb-Lazar-with-the-Big-Feet, our *melamed*, who tutored us when we were very young.

The first floor also housed the servants and guest quarters. Father had two assistants to help him with the affairs of the synagogue, and two maids helped Mama run the household.

Sarah the cook was my favorite. Getting up in the dark to make breakfast, she walked me up the hill to school. She lived with us through all the years of my youth, baking the Sabbath loaves and great pots of cholent, stews, and roasts. When she got sick, she hid her illness from everyone. "I don't want to die yet," she confided to me one night. "I don't want my children to blame the Rabbi that I worked too hard..."

Everyone called Yachet the maid "Yachet-the-Crazy-One", but she was harmless in her eccentricities and Mama kept her with us. Mama even arranged a match for her, but the marriage didn't last long, and Yachet remained with us. Once, she had a fight with Father's assistant. It was the second Seder of Passover, and our two helpers were tired and cross. When Father's assistant snapped at Yachet, she angrily dropped the tray she was carrying, breaking all the dishes and spoiling the food. "Don't worry, Yachet," Mama said soothingly. "It's just an accident."

Upstairs, we had a mysterious, unknown guest, a refugee from Russia who hid in the attic. We discovered him because of the missing food he had pilfered, but we never told the authorities of his whereabouts.

Down the back stairs was a wine-cellar and cold food-storage area, filled with bottles of kiddush wine, jars of jam and other perishable items. A childless couple lived in the *bashka*, a finished basement beneath the synagogue. In the back yard, by the herb garden, were the wood shed and the chicken coops.

In cold weather, the cook dressed the turkey in clothing to keep it warm! The children danced around the turkey, singing "kukriku, kukriku, when is Purim?"

Father received visitors in his book-lined study upstairs. In the small ante-room, Father's *gabai*, Reb Avrum, met the petitioners and helped them write their *kvittel* - a note containing their name and their request. Books filled the heavy, mahogany shelves in the salon. Sometimes, running my hand over the leather bindings of the holy books, I would take one down and open it, imagining that just by touching the books, I could absorb all the ideas, philosophies and teachings contained within.

Our large dining room, illuminated by crystal chandeliers, was extended to the adjoining salon on Passover Seder night and special occasions. The family heirlooms - silver kiddush cups and spice boxes - reposed during the week in the heavy silver chest. On Sabbaths and holidays, they were used with great pleasure. *Hidur-Mitzvah* - enhancing mizvoth by using beautiful objects - was emphasized in our family.

In the world of my childhood, material blessings were to be used for the glory of G-d. The simple act of lighting a Sabbath candle could illumine the darkest corners of doubt and despair. During the war, all our possessions were lost, together with the people who dedicated their use to the Holy One, Blessed Be He. But the bridge between heaven and earth was not destroyed. It is rededicated each time a mitzvah is performed. Blessing the wine and the bread, the spices and the flames, each simple act brings us closer to the One who created and who sustains us.

Zaydie

A Lesson of the Heart

Grandfather's name was Rabbi Yisroel Ashkenazi, but he was known in the Hassidic world as the Alesker Rebbe. I adoringly called him "Zaydie." He was my only living grandparent. Father's parents both died before I was born, and Grandfather's first wife, Chana, had also passed away. I was the first grandchild to be named in her memory. After the first World War, Zaydie moved from

Poland to the Rumanian town of Berlad, where he established his own Hasidic domain. There, I spent many happy summers in Zaydie's *hoif*.

I always envied my girlfriends who had grandmothers. How I yearned for a "Bubbie." It was to Zaydie that I turned. His face, beaming loving-kindness as he lavishly bestowed gifts, was the countenance of an angel. Zaydie listened to me, talked to me, and shared his wisdom. He taught me to listen to the songs of my heart.

During those summers we spent together, my aunt, Tante Rachel, Zaydie's unmarried youngest daughter, was going through a difficult teenage period. She was at the age when a young girl, especially the daughter of a Rabbi, is betrothed. She did not want Zaydie to find her a match. She wanted to meet someone on her own. There was much tension in the household over this issue, exacerbated by the plight of her sister, Tanta Rivka.

Rivka ended her unhappy marriage when she came home, pregnant, and had to wait for ten years until her husband finally granted her a divorce. Rachel saw her sister's unhappiness and feared being stuck in a loveless marriage with the wrong man. She wanted to make her own way in life.

I was a good and obedient little girl, ignorant of her troubles and worries. I thought she was jealous of me because of the way Zaydie paid attention to me. Perhaps, in her eyes, Zaydie liked me best because I carried Grandmother's name. His love for me differed from the love he bore his daughters. I was younger, and treasured every moment with him. They were older, and had their own problems.

Rachel refused the matches which Zaydie proposed. When she fell in love with a non-observant lawyer, Zaydie wouldn't hear of it, and made her break off with the young man.

That was a breaking point for them. Rachel, heartbroken, left home and came to live with us in Beltz. Later, Mama sent her to Vienna, the intellectual and cultural capital, to study. There, she joined a Zionist group of young people, making her way to the Holy Land before the war broke out. She married an

Egyptian-born Jew she met in the passport office. They lived a pious and devout life in Jerusalem, where she built a yeshiva in Grandfather's name.

But now I am getting ahead of myself. Let's return to Zaydie's house in Berlad, where he was the Hasidic Rebbe of the town.

Grandfather was assisted by Reb Avrom, his *Gabai*, a bearded Hasid who lived in Grandfather's household, faithfully attending to all of Zaydie's needs. One of his tasks was to serve as the intermediary between the Rebbe and his visitors. He wrote the letters of petition (*kvitlach*) which people brought when they came before the Rebbe, asking for blessings or advice. Reb Avrom screened the visitors first, then sent them in an orderly fashion into the great dining room where Grandfather received his guests, carefully reading each letter before speaking. Zaydie sat behind a long table covered with charity boxes from all the causes he supported, carefully considering each question, often consulting the holy books of Jewish Law before answering. He dispensed advice and blessings with compassion. The money his grateful visitors gave to him was immediately tithed, as Grandfather ceremoniously placed the coins into one or another of the charity boxes.

Even when he was seated at the table, you could see that Grandfather was a tall man, with noble bearing and twinkling blue eyes. Every year, Zaydie would travel to visit his Hasidim. On his way to Yadinitz, a small town in Bessarabia not far from Beltz, he spent a Shabbat with us. After his visit, he continued on to Belz, Poland to visit his Rebbe and ask for a blessing. Reb Avrom traveled with him, staying in a little room in our home. The Hasidim of our town would flock to pay their respects to my grandfather. Our house overflowed with visitors attending his festive Sabbath prayers and meals.

Grandfather's Rebbe was the Belzer Rav in Belz, Poland. In those days, the Belzer was considered the Rebbe of all the Rebbes. Zaydie visited him every winter, after the festival of Chanukah.

I always thought of my grandfather as the holiest man in the world. To me, he was as great as Moses. As a child, it confused me that every year he went to visit his Rebbe. I wondered why he had to go to a bigger Rebbe for advice or

blessings when everyone came to him for that. He was a Rebbe in his own right. Now, thinking back, I compare it with psychiatrists, who must undergo psychoanalysis as part of their training.

One day, after the stream of Hasidim had left, I found Grandfather standing alone at the far end of our great room. My parents had been pressuring me to become engaged to my cousin, a yeshiva student named Mottel. I was sixteen years old at the time, and not at all ready for marriage. I was torn between my desire to be the dutiful and obedient daughter of our Rabbinical household and my feelings, which caused such anguish and confusion.

Grandfather stood at the window, stroking his beard as he gazed through the lace curtains onto the street below, deep in thought. The door closed behind me, startling his reverie. He turned and looked at me, opening his arms in surprise.

"Channele, my dearest," he said, greeting me as no one but Grandfather could. "How are you, my daughter, my *shayna maidel*?"

"Oh, Zaydie," I replied, wishing I could still hug my venerable grandfather as I had when I was small. "My parents want me to get engaged to my cousin, Mottel. What do you think of that?"

Grandfather slowly walked over to me. It was customary in Hasidic Rabbinic households to arrange matches (*shidduchim*) with cousins, often with tragic results, the children born deaf, retarded or blind. I was tall and well-developed, and looked older than my sixteen years. My parents were planning for my future. Mottel would become a great Rabbi someday, and I would be his Rebbetzin. But Grandfather had another way of looking at the situation.

"Do you like him, my child?" he asked. His voice was kind, the tone concerned.

Mottel was a nice boy, a brilliant student. But try as I might, I couldn't imagine being married to him.

"I don't know," I stammered. "I like him as a cousin, but I don't love him as a bridegroom."

Grandfather looked down at me with his piercing blue eyes. Very quietly, he said:

"My child, if you like him, marry him. But if not, you are not obligated to listen to your parents. " Grandfather paused and sighed. Perhaps he was thinking of his younger daughters, each with her own unhappiness.

"You must listen with your heart," he said, tapping his own chest with clasped hands for emphasis. "Even if it contradicts your parents, listen to what your heart tells you."

My wise and loving Grandfather looked deeply into my eyes and understood me. He gave me courage and taught me to honor the songs of my heart. And so, I did not marry Mottel. Whenever my parents brought the matter up, I put them off. I wanted to finish high school and sit for the baccalaureate exams. I dreamed of attending university. My father did not know this. He thought it was high time for me to marry. But Mama understood me, and didn't press.

Zaydie went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, taking his *Gabai*, Reb Avrom along. There, he visited another daughter, Ethel, who lived with her family in Mea Shearim, selling books. He sent us a postcard from Hebron.

"I had the merit of praying at the Tomb of the Patriarchs," he wrote. "But I was only allowed to go up to the third step. There, I prayed for all of you, my dear children, and I know that my prayers will be answered."

Zaydie was already ill with the cancer which would take his life. He returned to Berlad, where his health deteriorated even further. That Passover, after the second seder, he had a premonition that he was dying, and asked his family to bring him to Kishinev, where his Hasidim would honor his final wishes. There he lingered until Pesach Sheni, when he died, and was buried in Kishinev.

My parents went to attend to him, but my studies prevented me from traveling. After the funeral, my parents called me and said: "You know, it was your grandfather's dying wish that you get married to Mottel."

I gulped, speechless. Surely this was not the time to discuss such a matter. How could I tell my parents that Zaydie understood Mottel was not my choice of bridegroom? Although I had deep reservations about going there, I wanted to be with my family for the *shiva*, the seven day period of Jewish mourning and so I agreed to come to Kishinev.

On my way to the train station, I went to buy stockings to match my gray coat. My errand took too long, and I missed the train. Poor Mottel came to the station to pick me up, but I never arrived. I still have a bad conscience about the way that I broke off our romance, but Zaydie had given me courage. He taught me to ask my heart, and my heart said no. Mottel married another girl, and I returned to my studies.

I finished high school, passed my matriculation exams, and applied to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. But the war approached, and I met the young man I would marry. I could hear the voice of my grandfather telling me: "Child, always listen with your heart," and I did get married, with an open heart, to a man I respected and loved.

Mama

I always say, whatever I am, it's because of my mother. Whatever I'm not is my loss. Mama had an everlasting influence on my life, imbuing me with a lifelong love for learning, teaching me how to listen and how to give. She raised me to be a daughter of Israel, to continue the sacred golden chain of tradition. She taught me to never forget who I am and where I belong.

Mama grew up in Poland, the eldest daughter of a pious, Hassidic Rabbinic household. Among her ancestors was the great Hassidic scholar, the S'fat Emet. At the age of seventeen, she was betrothed to my father. It was a good

match. My father, youngest son of the Azarnitzer Rebbe, of the lineage of the "Me'Or Eynayim" of Chernobyl, is descended from the Ba'al Shem Tov. There was great rejoicing at the joining of these two Chassidic dynasties.

As newlyweds, they moved to Budapest, Hungary, where I was born, and later settled in Beltz, in the province of Bessarabia, Rumania. Mama already spoke many languages. Learning Rumanian was harder for her. She spoke it with a Polish accent.

I am the first of the five children Mama brought into the world. When I was still very small, my baby sister got sick. With no antibiotics to treat her, she died. It was Friday night, and we had to wait until after the Sabbath to bury her. Her tiny body lay in the living room, with Mama crying over her, keening and wailing. I don't remember Mama ever mentioning her again. Perhaps, when she lit candles, her tears were shed for the baby who didn't survive. I was so young that I do not remember her name. Mama tucked that baby into a secret place inside her, and left me with one haunting memory, of the only time when she cried and wailed aloud.

Soon the family grew, with the arrival of my brothers, Aaron and Shimon, and Rivka, the youngest, our sister.

Mama oversaw the details of housekeeping in our home, but it was the performance of countless mitzvot which were her chief occupation. Shunning idleness in herself and in others, Mama dedicated herself to G-d, to her family, and to her community.

Although Mama was not very tall, she carried herself regally. Her posture gave her a stately, dignified bearing. Always poised and well-mannered, she spoke and acted with conviction. Every act and deed of her life illustrated the principles by which she lived. Her views did not always match my father's, but when they disagreed, they did so with mutual respect.

Father was head of the "Din Torah," the Rabbinical court which arbitrated disputes according to Jewish rather than civil law. Frequently called upon to make decisions and resolve conflicts, he so valued Mama's wisdom and

common sense that he often asked her opinion privately before announcing his own, calling Mama into a separate room for her understanding of the case at hand.

Early every morning, Mama devoted herself entirely to G-d, secluding herself until she finished her morning prayers and her recitation of the psalms. This was her private time, between her and G-d. She prayed in silence. As a small child, I would sit beside Mama while she prayed, holding a siddur in my hands, imitating the rocking movements of her prayers. Afterwards she emerged, radiant and smiling, to attend to her duties. The affairs of the household included planning the meals, which were prepared by the cook, and making food parcels for the poor. Once the work at hand was set in motion, she occupied herself with the petitioners who sought her help, or she went out visiting the old, the poor and the sick, bringing baskets of food and clothing to ease the misery of their lives.

At lunch time, the family sat together, discussing our daily concerns, our education and the development of our characters. Mama emphasized the importance of *midot* - positive character traits, such as kindness.

Late in the afternoon, visitors came for tea, chatting with Mama and asking her advice. Mama never missed the afternoon-evening prayers, listening from a corner of the women's gallery. After the evening prayers, the family regathered for dinner.

On Saturday afternoons, Mama and I sat together in the women's section of the synagogue listening to Father's Torahs, which he gave during the third meal. He always told mystical stories connected to the weekly Biblical reading. Afterwards, we discussed what we had learned. Mama insisted that we should learn something new every day. Mama's passion for knowledge led her to take radical steps in the education of her daughters.

Until the age of nine, I was taught by tutors at home. Then Mama persuaded my father to register me in the Jewish day school, which was called the *Tarbut Gymnasium*. It was unheard of, to send the daughter of a Hasidic Rabbi to public school, where there was the danger of mingling with all sorts of people

and ideas. Father was against it, but Mama had made up her mind. I was to have a modern education.

The morning of my first day of school, Mama woke me earlier than usual and helped me dress in the school uniform which was to be my costume for the next eight years. The dress was gray in winter, with a black apron, and beige in spring, with a white pinafore on top. I was nervous about starting school, but after a few days, my apprehensions vanished. It wasn't always easy to get up so early in the cold, winter mornings, but I rose to the challenge. Donning my uniform, I left the small universe of my Yiddish-speaking home for the larger world of the school, where I quickly mastered the Hebrew and Rumanian languages.

I was the first in the family to attend public school. My teachers had prepared me well, and I was able to enter in the fourth grade. I paved the way for my sister. Rivka began school at a younger age, in the first grade.

The *Tarbut* was a community-wide Hebrew day school, educating all the town's Jewish students, observant and non-observant together. Some were Hashomer Hatzair - socialist Zionists who dreamed of building the Jewish homeland in the collective farms of Palestine. Others, enchanted by the communist dream, yearned to cast their lot with the Russian masses. Most, however, were proud to be Rumanians. We waved the flag and sang the Rumanian national anthem. When King Carlos came to Beltz, all the school children, dressed in uniform, lined the streets to welcome him. Our teachers even taught us the blessing to say when seeing a king.

Our first big problem came with the short winter days. On Friday, the school day would run into the Sabbath. My father went to the school directors and convinced them to shorten all Friday lessons, so that the children could return home in time for Shabbat.

Father belonged to the "*Agudda*" stream. He considered the assimilated socialist-Zionists to be misguided, and their neglect of Jewish tradition a tragic embrace of modernity. Rather than shunning contact, however, he reached out,

advising the school authorities, and developing the Jewish studies curriculum to accompany our other subjects.

My horizons widened when I entered the *Tarbut* school, but I did not share the same freedoms as my classmates. For instance, it would be unseemly for the Rabbi's daughter to appear on stage in a play, so I was not allowed to participate in the Chanukah pageant. Nor was I allowed to visit in the homes of my friends, because they didn't observe the Sabbath.

One Shabbos afternoon I went for a walk and ended up at my girlfriend, Luba's house. Luba was so happy to see me that she squealed in delight and ran to ask her mother to make us some tea. Imagine my dismay when I heard the teakettle whistle that the water had boiled.

Now I realized why I was forbidden to go to the homes of my non-Sabbath observing friends. I never imagined that anyone would transgress G-d's law and cook on the Sabbath. It was a grave sin. I was shocked.

When I returned home, Mama was waiting for me.

"Where have you been, Chana?" she asked.

"I-I-I went for a walk," I stammered, my face flushing with shame.

"And where did this walk take you?" Mama probed.

"To Luba's house," I blurted.

Mama pursed her lips as she regarded me. I held my breath, certain that she could read every detail of my Shabbos afternoon misdemeanor on my face. The Rebbe's daughter who went on the holy Sabbath Day to the house of non-observers. Mama's gaze moved to the portrait of my Grandmother on the wall of the salon. Whenever I did something I wasn't supposed to, Mama would take me to Grandmother's portrait. "Chana," she would admonish me. "Never forget from whom you are descended. Would she approve of your actions?" I looked at Grandmother's portrait in silent supplication, feeling her disapproval.

"Next Shabbos," Mama finally pronounced, "you will invite Luba to come to our house before afternoon prayers"

And so, a new custom was born in the *hoif*, the custom of receiving my girl friends for Shabbos afternoon tea. After that day, every Saturday afternoon, Mama would make a tea party for my friends. Even now, I rarely visit people on Shabbat, preferring to receive guests in my own home.

Mama lived with one foot in each world. She was piously devout and scrupulous in her religious observance, but she was also a modern woman, seeing each of us as individuals. She was unusually broad-minded when it came to meeting her children's separate needs.

My brother, Aaron, was an exceptionally gifted student. He was the *talmid chochem* of the family, as befits the Rebbe's eldest son. He left home at the age of ten to study in Kishinev, as there was no yeshiva in our hometown. Aaron flourished in the yeshiva world. Not so Shimon, our younger brother, who chafed at the long hours of sitting and learning. Mama saw that his head was not cut out for it, that he was restless and prone to depression. Approaching a lumber man, she asked him to put Shimon to work.

"How can I hire a fifteen year-old boy to work for me?" the lumber man asked, eyeing the Rebbetzin dubiously. He could guess what her son must look like, puny and pale from sitting and studying all day.

"I myself will give you his wages," Mama quickly replied. "He must feel that he is earning his own pay."

Unable to resist a good deal, the lumber man agreed. After a few months, my brother had become so indispensable at the lumber yard that the man returned to Mama and said: "Rebbetzin, don't pay me anymore. Your son is a wonderful worker. From now on, I will pay him myself."

My brother, challenged by the physical demands of the work, grew tall and strong, made money, and was proud of himself.

Mama worked hard instilling self-esteem in Shimon, but to my regret, she never complimented or praised me. How I longed for Mama's stamp of approval, to hear her praise my appearance or my good grades. I was expected to be a good student, and Mama always dressed me in the finest clothes. Good grades, behavior and appearance were expected of a Rabbi's daughter. A neighbor once told me: "you are decorating the street when you walk by." Although others complimented me, Mama did only once.

My parents had just returned from one of their summer trips. They had gone to take the mineral waters, as they did each year. Their vacation involved moving the entire household and staff into smaller quarters, where there was little privacy. I hadn't gone with them. It was evening, and I walked out to greet my parents dressed in a white gown. "You look like an angel," Mama said as she kissed me. When Mama said that to me, I felt beautiful and loved. How I longed to hear Mama tell me again I am beautiful.

Mama knew nothing about the benefits of positive reinforcement, an unknown concept in her lexicon for raising pious children. The old-world pedagogy was too strongly ingrained. She was convinced that praise would swell our heads, causing us to lose our fear of heaven and neglect our share of the *mitzvos* we'd been put in the world to do.

This does not mean she belittled us. Rather, she taught by example. Mama's goodness was her crowning beauty. When it came to *tzedaka*, I don't think there was anyone who was as charitable as Mama. It was her philosophy that we are put into this world to do *tzedakah* and *chesed*, and she dedicated her life to her deeds of charity and lovingkindness. Mama believed that the highest level of *tzedakah* was to give charity "*b'seter* " anonymously.

Often, she gave charity without even my father's knowledge. Sometimes Father would find out what she had given, and he would ask her: "Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you discuss it with me?"

"You know, my dear husband," Mama would say, "in the world to come, we will each have separate accounts for everything. I will have my account and you will have yours. In this world, you do your share, and I will do mine."

A true woman of valour, Mama stretched out her hands to the poor and the destitute.

When the parents of the family next door to us got sick and could no longer work to support their children, Mama made up packages of food for their Sabbath table. It was my job to take this basket and leave it by their door. For years, they did not know where it came from.

In those days, the community wasn't so well-organized. People were starving. There was simply nobody to care for them. Mama never hesitated to step in. Later on, as the Jewish community became more responsive to people's needs, Mama was still the first to reach out.

"No matter how many *mitzvos* you do," she used to say, "it's never enough. There's always more to do, so much more." Nor did Mama hesitate to do the mitzvot herself. "Never delegate a mitzvah you can do to someone else," she insisted. "Do it yourself, and reap the reward."

Every winter, at Chanukah, Mama made a party for the residents of the "*moshav z'kaynim*," as we called the old-age home. Each woman received a new scarf and long underwear for the cold weather. Mama brought potato pancakes and made a meal for these old people. She took to heart the admonition, "*Al tashlicheini b'eyt zikna*," Do not forsake me in old age.

On Passover, Mama reigned triumphantly in her domain. On Seder night, she wore a precious tiara made of pearls and inset with tiny diamonds. She had inherited the tiara from her mother, and she wore it over her most elegant Sabbath wig, the one with braids wrapped high round her head. The wig was so full that it made her appear majestic and tall. The tiara made her look every inch her name, Malka Frieda, a joyous queen. The last Passover we were together, her new gown was of sky-blue velvet trimmed with white fur, over which she wore a white lace apron.

Passover preparations already began months before the holiday. In August, a messenger was sent to the farms to supervise the harvesting of the first grain, to be used in the *shmurah matzos*, guarding the harvest against contact with moisture. In September, the messengers went to the vineyards to select grapes for the Passover wine. Each year, Mama carefully selected the fabrics and styles for our new dresses. The seamstress came to measure and sew. In those days, clothes were custom-made, not found already hanging in a shop. Mama's clothes were always modest, befitting a Rebbetzin of her stature, but the fine fabrics were beautifully tailored and stylish despite the high neckline and long sleeves. Everyone in the household had new clothes for the holidays, including the servants and the neighbor's children.

Mama's presence at the Seder table, set with all our gleaming silver, was regal and composed. She glowed with satisfaction that all her toil had resulted in this grand event. There, at the head of the table in our huge dining room filled with guests, stood my father. Tall and impressive in his white kittel and white, silk embroidered yarmulke, he smiled lovingly upon his household. Dressed in new clothes, we were ready to begin our seder meal.

On the table was father's most prized possession, the silver, three-tiered seder plate which had been passed down from father to son for generations. Once it graced the seder table of none other than the holy Besht, the Baal Shem Tov, my great-great-great grandfather, the father of Hasidism, seven generations before mine.

Mama had mixed feelings about that seder plate. My father's two brothers also coveted the precious platter. Jealous when it was given to my father, years of ill-feeling between the brothers resulted from my father's inheritance. Mama thought that *shalom bayis* (peaceful family relations) was far more precious than silver or pearls, and she often tried to make peace between her husband and his brothers on account of that seder plate.

Mama felt that the finest garments a person could wear were those which could not be seen. These were the *mitzvot*. She taught us from a very young age to run and look for good deeds to do. Often, she assigned these deeds to us. I

remember one year our seder began late because Mama had sent my brother to the poor house with baskets of food and clothes for the seder guests there. She sent me on errands, too, and although I was not always a willing pupil of Mama's convictions, there was no way to refuse her bidding.

Mama considered it the highest mitzvah to help a poor girl get married. Once, when I was about fourteen years old, she made me go out collecting money to marry off a poor girl with no parents and no dowry. Mama decided that we should make her trousseau, with linens, blankets and clothes to wear.

Mama made a list of names of people who were well-off and sent me out to collect money from them. Because they respected my mother, I was well-received, and I was able to collect a lot of money, until I got to the last name on the list.

It was at the home of a wealthy family, with several unmarried daughters. Surely, I thought, they will be moved by the tale of this poor girl. The mother of the family came to the door and looked down her nose at me.

"Another charity in the community sends out a *shlepper*," she sneered sarcastically. "Your mother didn't have anyone else to send but you? She wants to make a *shnorrer* out of you?"

I came home crying bitterly, my heart heavy. I told Mama how her words had stung me, but Mama just smiled.

"She sees you as yet another collector," Mama said. "But she cannot see that because of your good deed, this poor soul can marry and have some happiness in life. Never mind the judgements of a wagging tongue. This *mitzvah* will outlast her barbs in the World to Come."

Mama knew her convictions were not always shared by my father. When I returned from the missions on which I was sent, she often cautioned me not to tell Father what I had done. She knew he'd be angry that she sent me out collecting. Nevertheless, that didn't stop her. We married off several poor girls, whose measure of happiness increased because of our efforts.

Another time, Mama sent me out with the schochet's daughter to gather manure to fix the floor at the poor house. The stench of the manure, which we kneaded into a paste, was unbearable. When we finished the floor, we bathed the residents, unfortunate souls cast off by circumstances of ill-health or misfortune. As distasteful as it was at the time, Mama firmly believed in building our characters by sending us out to do mitzvos in the world. Perhaps these lessons I learned as a young girl are what helped me to survive the ordeals which lay ahead. No mitzvah was too demeaning for Mama to tackle. If there was a need, she took it on as her task, completing it with pure intention and with all her heart.

Candles for Souls

Before Yom Kippur, in the women's section of the shule, Mama made *Nerot Neshama* - candles for souls . The sweet-smelling beeswax was heated and rolled out long and flat. Then, she placed long wicks on the wax, each wick representing one soul. Mama always made two large candles. One for the souls of the living, one for the souls of the dead. Her tears glistened as they rolled down her cheeks. Mama cried for each soul as she laid out the wicks, praying for them as she rolled them snugly into the softened wax. The *Nerot Neshama* were set into the sand tray, where they burned from before the *Kol Nidre* service until after *Neilah* at the conclusion of the fast.

Oh, how Mama cried while making those candles! Nowadays *yahrzeit* candles are purchased ready-made at the market. But I remember flames made from Mama's holy tears, and I remember her radiant face when she lit the Sabbath and holiday candles.

Mama's Tiara

Mama's Passover tiara was lost in the war, like all the precious possessions which disappeared with their owners. Years later, after I described it to my husband, he had another made for me. Pearls, but not diamonds. Pearls to wear in my hair at the Passover seder, as Mama did in Beltz long ago, before the war.

Mama still wears that crown, in the eternal loft of heaven where she resides. Her tiara is made of shiny pearls, the tears she shed while making those candles for the souls of the living and the souls of the dead, and inset with glittering diamonds forged by all the good deeds she performed. So Mama continues to be in style, regal and elegant in her gown woven of dreams and good deeds, trimmed with wisdom, and an apron of loving-kindness wrapped over it all.

My Father, My Rebbe

All children see their father as a great man, and I was no exception. My father was larger than life in my eyes, not only because of his impressive height, but also because of how others saw him. Father was the Rebbe and a *Gadol B'Torah*, an acclaimed Biblical scholar, revered by all. Living in the glass house of a Rabbinical *hoif* made it difficult to distinguish between private and public domains. Since our home also functioned as the synagogue and Father's office, I never knew when to call him Father, and when to call him Rebbe.

As a child, I never called my father "*Tate*," (Daddy). Nor did he call me by a pet name. Not Shayna (Beauty), not even Chanale. Only once, I called him "*Tate*." It was an occasion which required rehearsal. I had practiced for weeks with Mama for my recitation of the four questions at the Passover Seder. I was to begin by saying "*Tate, ich will fragen die fier kashes...*(Daddy, I will ask the four questions.)"

My heart was pounding, and I felt every eye at the table upon me. I sat next to Mama, and when it was time for me to ask the four questions, she pressed my hand with her own, our signal for me to begin. I gulped, blinked my eyes at the blur of silver table settings and glittering crystal chandeliers, and said it, "*Tate*" and it tasted sweet on my tongue, like forbidden fruit. Father, dressed in white for the holiday, smiled at me encouragingly as I chanted, but my moment in the spotlight was soon over, and I never dared to address him that way any other time. He was the Rebbe, and though I was his eldest child, I thought him too holy for familiarity. Although Father was soft-spoken and kind with everyone, he remained formal with me. He was the Rebbe, and I was the Rebbe's daughter. It

would not have been seemly for me to address him as my friends did their parents. I was so in awe of him that I always referred to him in the third person. "The Rebbe says..."

My father's striking appearance was emphasized by his impeccable manner of dress. Unlike most Rabbis who shunned neck ties in those days, he always wore a white shirt, tie and cufflinks. During the week, he wore heavy, silk house kaftans, and on Shabbos he donned a black, silk *kapota* under a heavy, silk coat. His fur-lined winter coat was topped by a sable *shtreimel* (fur hat.). Father's esthetic sensibility insisted that he always be well-groomed with nothing but the best, for himself and for his family.

Father's face radiated intelligence and kindness, magnetically drawing people to him. His deep-set eyes smoldered with mystery when contemplating the holy books, and twinkled with good will as he dispensed advice. While listening to people and contemplating their questions, he would finger his twisted side-curls, which he wore in the Chernobyl fashion, hanging into his beard. Heeding the Biblical injunctions against trimming the "sides of the beard," his *peyos* were never cut. No one ever saw them unwound to their full length, except perhaps Mama, when he returned from bathing at the *mikvah* on Fridays.

People from all walks of life came to our house, pious and non-religious alike. They came for a variety of reasons. Some needed help making a *shidduch* ; others came for business advice, to ask religious questions, or to resolve disputes. Although Father was not a doctor, that didn't stop people from asking him for medical advice. The pharmacist was surprised that Father knew what medicines to prescribe. I do not know how my father acquired this knowledge. Perhaps his ancestor, the Ba'al Shem Tov, who was renowned as a healer seven generations before, had passed the information down to his descendants.

Father engaged people when he taught, bringing them closer to Torah and mitzvot. He taught softly, by example. Every act of his life was performed with great *kavana*, purity of intention, attention to each detail. He always made kiddish with his tallis covering his head, holding his kiddish cup in the mystical fashion, his fingers forming the shape of the letter *hay* in G-d's name. For

mystical reasons, kiddush was never made before seven o'clock in the evening, even when the Sabbath began very early in winter. We prayed and then waited silently in the candle light for Father to emerge from his study, singing *Shalom Aleichem* to welcome the angels and *Eishet Chayil* in praise of Mama. My brothers and every man at the table also made kiddush, each with his own goblet and two loaves of bread, that each should feel he was his own "*balaboos*" - master of his own domain. Father always had twelve challahs for the Sabbath - the number of show-breads on the altar in the Holy Temple. Our dining table was a *mikdash me'at*, a small version of the Temple.

Many guests clustered around our Sabbath table. Some ate with us; others came after the meal, to join the singing, stories, and words of Torah. Late in the afternoon, at the third meal, the joy of the Sabbath permeated the atmosphere so totally that time seemed to stretch endlessly before us. Father would tell the Hasidic stories he had learned from his father as a child, stories of the Baal Shem Tov or from the Chernobyler dynasty. Then, as the magic of the tale lingered in the air, he would softly begin a melody, crooning until all joined in, and the *nigun* took on a life of its own, lifting all present into the ecstasy of song.

Whenever Father traveled, we all lined up to kiss his hand before his departure. One day, I waited with my sister as all of Father's Hassidim came to bid him farewell. One of them, Reb Chaim, commiserated with me.

"It must be hard for you to share your father with us," he said. "For us, he is the Rebbe, but for you, he is the Father..."

I did not reply. At that moment, I realized that my Father was my Rebbe, even more than he was my Father. The distance between us was vast and unbridgeable. I was a mere school girl, while he was a great scholar, unapproachable and holy. Yet, despite the distance between us, we were very close. Beneath the expectations and the roles we played ran a deep wellspring of affection.

My sister, Rivka, felt no obligation to maintain a standard of daughterly comportment. Such expectations were simply not part of her vocabulary. I was

the eldest. She was the baby. She took our father's dual identity as Rebbe to all and Father to us as a fact of life with no particularly distressing aspects.

As a toddler, she had no qualms about bursting into his office to climb into his lap, looking coolly at his visitors as she grabbed a chunk of his beard with her chubby fingers.

I envied the easy familiarity of my sister's relationship with our father. He called her "Rivkale," and seemed to delight in her questions.

In our household, no one ever entered or left a room without kissing the mezuzah. There was a mezuzah affixed to the doorpost of every room in the house, mounted on a slanting diagonal, with the letters *shin-daled-yud* on the cover, forming an acronym for "*Shomer Delatot Yisrael*" "Guardian of the doors of Israel."

From an early age, Rivka imitated Father's custom of kissing the mezuzah, touching the scroll and then kissing his fingertips, eyes closed. "Zuzah!" she would shriek at every threshold pointing up at the mezuzah until someone lifted her up to touch it and then kiss her fingers. As she grew older and taller, we measured her growth against the amount of assistance required to help her reach the mezuzah. She knew she was nearly grown when she could reach it herself, unaided.

"What is inside the mezuzah, Rivkale?" Father asked one day as she squirmed in his arms to reach the mezuzah.

"*Sh'ma Yisrael*," she immediately replied, chanting the verses of Deuteronomy which contain the Jewish credo proclaiming the Oneness of G-d. She had been singing the *Sh'ma* after kissing the mezuzah since she was a very small child. It was part of her nightly bedtime ritual.

Father's face crinkled into a wide smile at her mispronounced words. Patiently prompting her when she paused, he helped her fill in the missing words.

I watched from the hallway, waiting for Father to hand my little sister to me, wishing I felt as spontaneous and as free as she did.

As I reached adolescence, I began to disagree with my parents more and more often. Sometimes the matter was trivial, such as when I coveted the platform shoes which were the rage, and was forbidden to wear. They did not meet Father's standard of dignity.

Other matters were much more serious. One of our neighbors, a tailor, asked me to tutor his daughter in mathematics and Hebrew. He said he would pay me. I loved this little girl, and felt honored to be asked to share my knowledge with her. I gladly agreed, and enjoyed our lessons, until Father heard about it. He did not think it was dignified for the Rebbe's daughter to be teaching the daughter of a poor tailor. He said it was beneath my station in life, and made me give it up. I vehemently disagreed with him. What is undignified about teaching? But how dare I contradict him? In the end, I reluctantly ended our lessons.

Although I obeyed my parents, I seethed inwardly, because it seemed so unjust. Father's wishes were always a command to me. Willing or unwilling, I accepted and obeyed. I was the oldest. I was expected to set an example for the others.

When I was twelve, I was already taller than Mama, and fully developed. I was still a young girl, but I already looked like a woman. My parents began to plan for my future.

Father bought a big apartment house in Kishinev, which was to be part of my dowry. I began traveling to Kishinev to learn to manage the tenants. My parents wanted to provide an income for my support when I would marry and have my own family. Father intended to betrothe me to my cousin Mottel, with income from the apartment rentals to support us. In the end, I didn't marry Mottel, and the war took the apartment building.

As I finished high school, I was determined to sit for the baccalaureate exams, so I could continue my education in college. Mama and I kept this desire a secret from Father, who only heard about it indirectly. One of his Hasidim saw

my name in the newspaper, in a list of those who had passed the examinations. He came to wish my father *Mazeltov*.

"Why *Mazeltov*?" Father wanted to know.

"For your daughter," replied the Hassid.

"But my daughter has no *shidduch*," Father protested.

"Look, Rebbe," the Hasid exclaimed, showing him the newspaper with my name mentioned in the list of students. "She passed the matriculation exams!"

Father bent over the newspaper to see where the man pointed. He asked his assistant to summon us, motioned us into his office and closed the door.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he wanted to know. Mama had paid the examination fees without telling him. I fidgeted uncomfortably, waiting for him to congratulate me, but he did not. Instead, he dismissed us abruptly, and we drank our tea alone that day.

I felt guilty about keeping my exams secret from Father. I never liked to risk his displeasure or anger, and though I knew he preferred open communication, I also knew he would not have supported my educational goals.

Mama's independence was achieved covertly. When she saw what was best for her children, she unhesitatingly forged ahead, even when her actions countered Father's wishes. It was she who insisted on my education from the start, and who supported me in finishing with honor.

It was also Mama who took charge of finding a suitable *shidduch* for me, one pleasing to both the bride and her Father. Mama had seen what happened with her sisters, and was determined that I would not suffer a similar fate. She knew I wanted to marry someone whose feet were planted firmly in both worlds, in the mystical-spiritual Hasidic world of our home, and in the modern world of ideas and culture as well. She heard about a young philosophy professor who was

the new Chief Rabbi of Radautz, and wrote to his mother. We were invited to come to Chernovitz to meet him.

Rabbi Dr. Shimshon Stein was tall and handsome, educated in Vienna, where he'd earned his doctorate in Jewish philosophy as well as his Rabbinic ordination. Returning to his home town, he took the position of Chief Rabbi, replacing the old Rabbi, who had died. He was twenty-four years old, and ready to marry. He needed a Rebbetzin.

Father and I took the train to Chernowitz. I wore a spring suit of light blue wool, with a white blouse. Mama had sent my photograph with her letter, again in secret. As the train traveled, I wondered about the man I was to meet, whether he would appreciate and encourage my intellectual yearnings or expect a house-bound Rebbetzin.

We met for tea in the lobby of the hotel. I hardly dared glance at the young man I had come to meet. Father, however, looked searchingly at the prospective bridegroom, eying his modern-cut suit, clean-shaven cheeks, and neatly trimmed goatee, and sighed. This Rabbi-Doctor did not look like a hasid. As the men began to discuss the holy books, however, Father's countenance lightened. The depth and brilliance of Rabbi Stein's scholarship paved the way for the first of many lengthy discussions.

Listening as I gingerly sipped the tea, I began to relax. The young Rabbi asked me if I would like to go walking with him. We strolled out into the tree-lined beauty of Hapsburg Park, speaking thoughtfully of our goals in life. He appreciated the fact that I was the pious daughter of a Hasidic Rebbe, that I had graduated from high school and passed my baccalaureate exams. We shared a similar outlook on life and were looking for the same things in our marriage partner. I liked him, and he liked me. Mama had found my *basherte*, my intended one. My future with him looked promising.

When we returned to the hotel an hour later, Father was still sitting in the lobby where we had left him. "Time for Mincha, the afternoon prayers," he said, as he stood up. The two Rabbis left me standing in the lobby as they went to pray.

Our engagement was announced a short time later, and soon I left for Yasse to have my trousseau made. The dizzying whirl of wedding preparations obscured the grim realities unfolding around us. The summer of 1939 was an ominous time to plan a celebration, but we did so with faith and with hope in a brighter future.

Whenever I kiss a mezuzah, I think of my father. Alas, in those terrible times, the mezuzahs did little to protect the doors of the Jews. Was the Guardian of Israel, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, still watching over us?

Father's faith and devotion to G-d were unshakeable. Even when he was arrested and imprisoned as the leader of the Jewish community, he placed his faith in the Lord and prayed. He wrote to us, a postcard from prison. It said: "Every day I am saying Hallel, chanting the psalms." By this we knew that he referred to the psalm which says: *"Min Ha Metzhar Karati Kah... From the narrow straights I call to Thee. Answer me from Your vast unbounded spaces."* Indeed, he was released, returning to the flock he served.

Father's commitment to serving his congregation was so strong, that although he urged those who could to flee, he refused to do so himself. Sharing the fate of his community, he and Mama, Shimon and Rivka were among the first to be deported from Beltz, forced from the home where I was raised, and sent to one of the camps in Transnistria, to Abodovka, where they perished...

A Wedding and A War

As a child, I had a horrible fear of war. What does it mean to have enemies? I wondered. It was beyond my comprehension. It seemed to me that the world should be filled with goodness. I didn't see anything wrong with people. I was naive when it came to questions about friends and enemies.

"What does it mean to have an enemy?" I asked my mother one day.

"You know what an enemy is?" Mama replied. "If we don't like each other. If we don't take an interest in each other. If we hate each other. That's what it means to have an enemy. Because of hatred, we have conflicts and war."

Mama's answer did not satisfy me. I continued with my questions. "How is it possible for people not to like each other? On what grounds?"

I thought the whole world exists because of good people. Are we not all made in the image of our Creator? In our house, I saw love and understanding, and when people brought problems and disputes to my father, the Rebbe, I saw there was always a solution. I lived in a world where problems and conflicts could be resolved. So I never understood why people don't like each other.

The political situation in Europe began to crumble. New parties arose in Germany, governments fell and were replaced. I began to fear the war on our horizon. Most Jews didn't believe it would come to that. How could anyone foresee the magnitude of evil, of *sinas chinam*, of causeless hatred, which would be unleashed? Our home was a magnet for so many people. Our *hoif* - where people came for prayer, celebration, advice and blessings - was to be destroyed. But why? Our Jewish community did not want to believe it could end, not until the last minute.

The war started on September 1, 1939, and I was married a few days later, on September 5th. At the celebrations, there was much optimistic talk of the defeat which would surely come quickly. Many welcomed the advent of the war, seeing in it a chance for a better tomorrow, for the destruction of Germany. The dancing honored bride, groom and tradition, but a deeper, unspoken fear lurked beneath our merriment. Mama, for one, did not share in the general aura of optimism. "In war, one can never know," she foreboded.

We were married in Beltz. Many guests came in from Radautz, in honor of their Chief Rabbi's marriage, and from all over the region. According to Hasidic custom, the bridal canopy was erected outside the synagogue, beneath the vault of heaven.

Inside, before the ceremony, I sat on a bridal throne. The women approached to whisper their blessings, giving me their names written on pieces of paper. According to legend, the gates of heaven open wide for bridal prayers. "Pray for me," the women implored as they pressed their names into my hand. The wedding day is like Yom Kippur with fasting, asking forgiveness, and praying for the good of all.

Before the *bedeken*, the ceremony veiling the bride before the wedding, Father came to bless me.

"*Chen, Chen*," he whispered to me, as I sat, covered in lace, waiting to be led to the bridal canopy. Father stretched his two hands over my head in blessing. "May you be blessed with the grace and wisdom of our foremothers, of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah." My father stood above me, chanting psalms. I felt his blessings even more than I heard them. My father's blessings felt like a protective shield, surrounding me with holiness and purity. He finished with the whispered blessings which have accompanied me throughout my life. "*Nesiyat Chen v'rav Tova*," "Go with grace and may every goodness and blessing be your portion in the eyes of G-d."

A host of men sang their way into the *Bedeken* room, leading my husband-to-be toward me. Dressed in his white kittel, he looked like a white-robed angel in a sea of black-suited Hasidim. As they sang, he stopped and gazed at me, smiling as he approached holding a thick veil of lace. He has seen that I am the right bride, not an imposter like the Biblical Leah, who took her sister, Rachel's place. As he covered my face with the veil, I looked up into his eyes, hoping my father's blessings would always be with us.

Then the men disappear toward the chuppah. "Let me walk with grace into this unknown chapter of my life," I pray.

A flicker of doubt creeps beneath the delicate lace of the bridal veil as I walk into my future, dancing upon the filigree of fabric, causing my breath to be shallow. I feel faint, oxygen deprived, dizzy from fasting, as though treading in slow-motion, under water, viewing myself from a great distance.

There goes a young woman, clothed in white, whose face is veiled, carrying her secret thoughts and fears within her.

I wonder if Zaydie whispered the same blessing to Mama when she married. And Grandmother, how was her wedding? Her name was Chana, my name. The blessing carries an imperative: "*chen, chen*" live up to your name, be Chana, Chen, full of grace. And does it ever happen that a bride named Chana blessed with grace trips over her dress, stumbles, falters?

I am already praying that my step remain steady. May I imbue each moment of the life I am entering with beauty, intelligence and grace. What kind of Rebbetzin will I be? My hands open to the needy, I will be as full of good deeds as a pomegranate is full of seeds. I pray with such intensity that the gates of heaven will surely be moved to grant my petition.

I feel suspended, as though walking on a cloud, and the cloud becomes a canopy of peace protecting the Jews of Europe. *Chen, chen* on all of us.

Beneath the bridal canopy, accompanied by the mothers, I circle seven times around my bridegroom, betrothing him unto me with my grace, a dance of seven circles, as the sun rises and sets seven times each week, until I am dizzy with circling.

Then I take my place beside him and a blessing welcomes us, and I feel my Grandmother standing next to me, and all the other Chanas in our family, a host of ancestors rejoicing in this shiny new link in the golden chain of generations.

A sip of wine, a shattering of glass, a drop of wine spilling onto the pure white fabric of my wedding dress, a chorus of mazeltovs, and the two of us, soaring.

How was I to know that our happiness on the day of our rejoicing would not extend unto eternity? I knew no such thing.

After the ceremony, horse-drawn carriages transport the numerous guests to the wedding banquet. At the head table, magnificently set with silver soup bowls and silver spoons, dinner is served. Sitting in my white gown with the tight

bodice, I watch the guests, including hundreds of Rabbis and Hasidim from all over Bessarabia.

The dancing and speeches continue long into the night. Our "*yichus*" (ancestry) is recounted as we are blessed by all.

The "*Mitzvah Tanz*". Everyone wants to dance with the bride. It is forbidden to touch her, so the dancers hold onto a *gartel*, a sash from my father's coat. I dance with my father and with all the Rabbis, until I am exhausted.

At the dinner, the talk turns to the war looming on our bright horizon like a dark storm cloud which soon must burst. I wonder if perhaps we should have left for Palestine, to live near my aunt, who is poor but far from immediate danger. Brushing the thought away like a strand of untidy hair, I know it is useless to wonder what would have been. I have made my choice. I feel a shift inside myself, noticing that my prayers now include him, that I pray not only for myself but for both of us. May the blessings we have received accompany us into our future. May we be blessed with *chen*, with grace.

Throughout the following week, at the "*Sheva Brachot*," festive meals honor the newlyweds, and the seven wedding blessings are again recited.

On our way to Radautz, we stop overnight in Yasse, where my cousin, the Rabbi of Yasse, Harav Yoel Ashkenazi and his Rebbetzin, Rivka, host the last of the seven wedding feasts in our honor. We stay in a fine hotel, rejoicing deeply.

When we arrive in Radautz, a delegation of my husband's congregants meet us at the train station, with a carriage to bring us and our wedding gifts to our new home. Instead of horses, they themselves pull the carriage, with much singing and dancing. The parade winds its way through the streets of the town, attracting much attention. They pour water before us, following the Hasidic custom of pouring out water before the bride and the groom, echoing the days of the Temple in Jerusalem, when water libations were poured during the Festival of Sukkoth. Rosh Hashana is upon us. How auspicious to enter the New Year with all these blessings.

Our synagogue, the largest one in town, seats 600 people. I am given the seat of honor in the front row of the beautiful women's gallery upstairs, beside my husband's mother and sisters. My name is engraved on a crown-shaped medallion, and nobody else is allowed to sit in my place. How proud I feel, looking down at my tall, handsome husband, dressed in his white holiday robe and prayer shawl, with the cylindrical, white satin, High Holiday Rabbinical hat. His face shines like the High Priest on Yom Kippur. In his *Shabbos Shuvah* sermon during the Ten Days of Repentance, on the "Sabbath of Return," he addresses the insecurities of our times. The standing-room-only crowd listens attentively, turning their prayers to the One from whom help comes.

I am the new Rebbetzin. Being thrust into the spotlight of public scrutiny is disconcerting, yet curiously thrilling. Everyone watches to see how I look, dress, behave. I quickly discover that whenever I am out in public, I must sit in one spot. The people who want to greet me must come to me. Woe to me if I get up to address one person without including everyone!

Our new home has no furniture, so we live with my mother-in-law until it arrives. Yehudis Stein, my husband's mother, welcomed me with open arms and a warm heart. She was widowed at an early age. She raised three children by herself, providing them with a proper education. A business woman, she owned a few commercial properties whose rents supplemented the income she received from her own fabric shop. She was elegant and well-groomed. I respected and admired her.

What joy when we finally moved into our own large house, with its extensive library and office. Elegant and well-appointed, it was formal yet always open to family and friends. There were servants - a cook and a maid - who did the work of the household. My husband was meticulous about his appearance, insisting that his handkerchiefs be ironed on both sides. My new life was a challenge. I was no longer known as the Rebbe's daughter. Now, although far from my family, I did my best to fill my new role as "Frau Rabbiner," the Rabbi's wife, with dignity. I was always busy, but there was still time to read, and I had friends.

My sister-in-law, Koka, was my best friend and advisor. We adored each other. Koka had lived in Vienna and studied in the university there. She was also an

accomplished pastry chef. Her younger sister, Rosa was the only one in the family who had not studied in Vienna. Rosa lived at home with her mother and worked in the City Hall.

My husband, Rabbi Dr. Shimshon Stein, was tall and broad-shouldered. He combed his dark hair back, revealing a handsome face, with a penetrating gaze beneath distinguished, angled eyebrows and round, wire-rimmed glasses. He kept his goatee neatly trimmed. A well-rounded scholar, Rabbi and philosopher, he was a controversial figure to the old-timers of Radautz, many of whom were suspicious of his contact with the modern, secular world. However, when he married me, their misgivings faded. My Hasidic upbringing was enough to restore credibility in their new spiritual leader.

We established an elegant home, which I imagined we would fill with children and guests, scholarship and good deeds, in the manner of the Hasidic rabbinical household of my childhood. Soon we were blessed to discover I was pregnant. But the war was to shatter our dreams.

Birth, Bombs and Deportation

1941

I was pregnant when the war reached Rumania. The Germans attacked by air. One by one, the towns of Rumania fell to the Nazi regime. In Beltz, an air raid destroyed two-thirds of my home town's buildings. Huddled by the radio, I anxiously listened to the news. The phone lines were down. There was no contact with my family. What had become of them? Mama managed to write, and miraculously, her letter arrived. They were safe, for now. Our house was still standing, but Father had been arrested and imprisoned along with all the other Jewish community leaders.

I tried to imagine my father in a cramped prison cell, praying, uplifting his fellow prisoners, beseeching the Almighty to come to their aid. Later, a post card arrived. "I am davening *Hallel* every day," he wrote. *Min HaMetzar Karati Kah, from out of the narrow straits, I call to Thee...*

Will I ever see my family again? What will become of us? And this baby, growing and kicking inside my womb, will he never meet his grandparents? I took refuge in my *siddur* and the prayers seemed to quiet my child. I found great comfort in the words of the ancient prayers. Surely there is a sustaining Hand to help us in our perilous time. As I prayed, I felt strongly connected to all the generations of our people in their hour of suffering. My tears rolled down my cheeks, as I remembered the teachings of my Father. G-d wants us to come before Him broken-hearted, for our prayers to arise from utter despair.

After Father was released from prison, we received one last letter. Then, we heard no more. Later we learned the bitter truth, that our family had been deported with the first transports of Jews out of Beltz.

The baby continued to grow within me. I worried: how can I deliver this child into such an uncertain world? I dreamed of nursing my babe to contentment at my breast, of watching my child growing up happy and healthy, learning Torah with sweetness and joy, running and playing freely.

When I married, my parents commissioned a scribe to write a Torah scroll, which they intended to dedicate on the birth of their first grandchild. They sent my brother, Aaron, to Chernowitz, to check on the work in progress. It was just after the holiday of Shavuoth. On his way back from Chernowitz, Aaron came to visit me. The Germans occupied Beltz a few days after he arrived. The border was closed. He couldn't leave.

And so, my brother, Aaron, stayed with me. This was my luck. We were together through all of those dangerous days and tragic nights.

One hot, summer day, I left the house and walked to town. I needed a few things for the Sabbath. As I entered the shopping district, I caught sight of my reflection in a shop window, and noticed the growing curve of my belly in profile. I smiled, wondering about the tiny person curled up inside me, quietly growing in the silent world of my womb.

A strange sound began to fill the air, creeping into my reverie like a swarm of distant insects. The townspeople came out to the street and craned their necks

up toward the sky. There, an awesome sight quickened our pulses with fear. These were not insects, but bombers, their droning gathering momentum until the bombs were released, screeching as they careened through the air, exploding with sickening randomness. The first bombing raid on our town had begun. All around me, terrified people scrambled in every direction. Joining the hysterical rush homeward, I forgot what I had gone into town to buy.

I had only one thought, to return home safely. The house was cool and dark. Sheltered from the chaos around me, I sank down into a chair in the salon, trembling.

Suddenly, a fierce pain assaulted my abdomen. It's too early, I thought to myself with alarm. I'm not ready. This is just the beginning of my eighth month. I cried out in pain and in fear. How could I be going into labor as bombs were falling?

Shimshon heard me scream, and when he saw me, pale and doubled over in pain, he tried to reassure me and left to fetch the midwife. The labor lasted all day and through the night, as bombs whistled and exploded all around us. I desperately ached for Mama to be with me. Surely she would have wanted to help with the birth of her first grand child. Mama had always been there when I needed her, as she had cared for all of us, her own children and the countless others she adopted. In between the pains, I prayed with all my might. I prayed for a healthy baby. I prayed for deliverance for all of us from the anguish and the suffering of our lives.

Shimshon, too, spent the night in prayer, together with Aaron. The baby was finally delivered in the morning. He was so tiny that I was afraid to touch him. This fragile new life, summoned by bombs before his time, now struggled to survive.

The midwife called for my husband, and when he saw his newborn son for the first time, he began to weep. We named him David, after my father-in-law, who had been murdered by hooligans at the trade mart while Shimshon was still a boy. His mother and sisters arrived soon after, their arms laden with gifts for the new child.

Because David was premature, the circumcision, which should have taken place on the eighth day after his birth, was postponed. He entered the covenant a month later, in a double ceremony of *brith milah* and *pidyon ha ben*, redemption of the firstborn son. Shining with pride, Shimshon delivered a *d'var Torah* to a house packed with well-wishers. Everyone came. This was to be the last simcha in our community. On Tisha B'Av, when we mourn the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and our expulsion from the Holy Land, evacuees began arriving from neighboring communities, seeking shelter with the townspeople. We also took in our share of refugees. The Vishnitzer Rav from Siret and his family stayed with us.

The newcomers brought with them horrible stories, and rumors began circulating about what would become of us. Nobody wanted to believe what they heard.

"It can't happen to us," people said when the rumors started. Until the actual ordinance for transport arrived, the Jews of Radautz refused to believe the stories, clinging to an attitude which in the end protected no one.

After Rosh Hashana, my husband was arrested, together with all the other community leaders. They were held at the City Hall. The authorities, using the same strategy employed in Beltz when my father was arrested, aimed to break the community by intimidating its leaders. Then Shimshon got sick, and was sent home. The doctors didn't know what was wrong with him, and advised him to seek medical treatment in Bucharest.

Aaron and I accompanied him, leaving the baby at home with a nurse. A few days later, on Erev Yom Kippur, he died. Just like that, he was gone. This tall, strong, vigorous man, a gentle scholar and philosopher, snuffed out. No diagnosis was reached. The doctors speculated that food poisoning had killed him, or some kind of mysterious infection. We didn't tell his mother that her only son had died. She would have gone into shock. Koka told her he had gone to Bucharest on business, to inquire about the position there as Chief Rabbi. Mercifully, Aaron had accompanied us, so I was not entirely alone. We buried Shimshon in Bucharest, and I returned home drained and defeated, a widow. I

was still a bride, but the groom was dead. Our short-lived marriage, which had started so beautifully, had tragically come to an end.

As I began to comprehend the severity of our situation, I, too, began to plan for departure. I entrusted my belongings to a non-Jewish acquaintance, extracting a promise that if I survive, these precious belongings, - the library and the furniture - would be returned to me.

My parents never saw their grandson. They never even knew he was born. They never dedicated the Sefer Torah which they had commissioned in honor of his birth. But there was hardly a moment to mourn.

Refugees from the entire region continued to flood into Radautz, which was the designated central gathering point. Thousands gathered in our big synagogue. It was the holiday of Succot.

The police chased people out of their homes. Only then did realization of the magnitude of the situation slowly set in. We were divided into different groups. Each section was sent to a different part of the German occupation. As community leaders, we were the last to be transported, with the third section.

The autumn of our departure was bleak, cold and wet. It seemed that nature was crying for us. I had packed all our documents and valuables into a locked suitcase. As we neared the train station, we were chased onto the trains. Our baggage was confiscated with the beautiful baby carriage. All our documents were lost. I grabbed the baby and entered the train with only the clothes I was wearing and a small rucksack with night clothes, a few towels and undergarments. We were stuffed into cattle cars. There were no toilets; there was no water. Somehow, I managed to nurse my infant. I had no diapers to change him, and his sensitive skin was soon covered with a terrible rash. He suffered, but he had no strength to cry.

We celebrated Simchat Torah on that train. Miraculously, someone carried a Torah scroll.

"It is Simchat Torah! Let us rejoice!" Rabbi Stern urged us, and we lifted our arms in dance, in the cattle car taking us to our unknown destination.

A rumour circulated that upon arrival at the next station, anyone possessing money or jewelery would be killed. Panic set in as those with money hurried to burn it. Many fell ill and died on that fateful journey, eight days of hell. We disembarked in a city called Ataki, on the banks of the Dniester River.

At the Ataki station, we were met by the horrifying sight of a group of mental patients from the asylum in Chernowitz, who had arrived just before us. Half-naked and disoriented, their flimsy hospital gowns did little to protect them from the cold rain. Sick and crying, the mad shrieked and laughed deliriously, running to keep warm as the Germans herded them onto wooden barges to cross the river, which was filled with the cadavers of those who lost their balance, fell overboard and drowned.

My uncle, Rabbi Zweig, was once the Rabbi of Ataki, but there was no time to think of looking for him. As I stood in the station looking at the dreadful scene in front of me, it took all my strength to stay together with my brother and with Koka, Rosa and Yehudis. Clutching the baby tightly in my arms, we were herded onto the next barge and ferried across the muddy, bloodied waters of the river to the other side.

There was a pharmacist with us. On the journey, he helped with what medicines he had. At the river, overcome with horror, he, his wife and their son took poison to end their misery. Only their daughter-in-law remained.

Mogilev
The Hand of G-d
A Story of Transnistria
1941-44

Our destination was Mogilev-Podalsk, a town on the Ukrainian side of the Dniester River, which formed the Russian-Rumanian border. All Jews deported from the Rumanian provinces of Bessarabia and Bukovina were sent to the

various hamlets in the region, which was called Transnistria because it was over the Nistru (Dniester) River.

Jews had been living in Mogilev, the capital of Podalsk province, for three hundred years, through all the boundary changes and pogroms. It so happened that our family had lived there before the revolution. Grandfather left Chernobyl with his family, and lived over the hill in a nearby town called Asarnitz. During World War I, the family dispersed, some to Poland and others to Hungary and Rumania. Two of my uncles lived in Mogilev, where they buried our grandparents in the Jewish cemetery when they died. Indeed, there is still a family grave there, with a tombstone on which is carved a tree with a broken branch, above the place where my cousin, a young yeshiva student, is also buried. Now we were among the deportees arriving there.

Strategically located on the railroad line, Mogilev was part of the route used by the Germans to send provisions to the Russian front. The bridge had been destroyed by bombs, so when we arrived, the river could be crossed only by barge. Later, a pontoon bridge served as a temporary replacement until the bridge was rebuilt. The Germans left local Russian functionaries in charge of civil administration, concentrating their efforts on military endeavors.

It was raining heavily when we arrived. The town was badly damaged - first by bombings and then by the floods, whose knee-deep waters had somewhat subsided by the time we arrived, leaving a residue of mud on the floors of the houses. Most of the town's inhabitants had fled. Even though the windows had all shattered in the bombardments, there would be a roof over the heads of those fortunate enough to get inside and dry off.

There was a scramble to find shelter in the empty rooms of the deserted houses. A local woman named Manya, who had not left the town when her neighbors fled, took pity on us and called us into her little hut. She gave us something warm to drink and shared what meager provisions she had with us. Grateful and weary, we sank down upon the bedding she arranged on her floor, revelling in the space to stretch our cramped limbs.

"Aaron," I said to my brother that night. "We must find a way for our community to stay in this place. Who knows what will happen to us if we are forced to leave? "

Indeed, unbearable sights had already greeted us, of parents being separated from children with shouts, screams and cries of agony.

"Our family once lived in Mogilev," Aaron agreed. "Our grandparents are buried here. Surely their merit will intercede for us."

"It is meant to be that we have come to a town in which our family once lived." I mused. "There must be someone in charge of this city who knew our grandparents and our uncles, who can help us."

In the morning, Manya told us where we could find the senior official in charge of the city. Aaron stayed with the baby, and I left in the direction she sent me. I arrived at the gloomy building which served as City Hall on a chilly day, and found my way upstairs to the office of Comrade Dimitri Stefanescu, a bearded Russian functionary charged with running the city. Dressed in a winter coat and fur hat, he paced to keep warm, his desk piled high with papers awaiting translation. A cold, half-filled glass of tea from the previous day was perched between the piles of papers. Except for a small pool of light from a kerosene lantern, the room was dark. Outside, leaden clouds obscured what light might enter the world below. The broken windowpane was covered with paper, which did little to keep out the cold.

The empty chair opposite Comrade Dimitri Stefanescu's desk reminded him of his secretary, an aging Russian woman who wore a babushka scarf around her head. Where was she? Where was his hot tea? The chair would accommodate any visitor who might get past the secretary to petition him for his time. He resented all the intruders. They sapped his energy, most of which went into trying to stay warm as he tackled the overwhelming tasks before him.

Comrade Dimitri shivered as a draft of cold air penetrated the paper window, and cursed his fate at being assigned to this miserable town. Not that he was new here. He had, in fact, been living in Mogilev most of his life. Now the Germans had turned it into a provision station on their way to the Russian front,

and it was part of the German plan for relocating undesirable Jews out of Rumania.

Dimitri Stefanescu had received no directives from higher-ups as to what to do with the thousands of Jews who passed through the area under his jurisdiction. The people were starving, frightened, hysterical, and sick. Some had gone mad.

A knock on the door. Ah. Perhaps the secretary had managed to make some tea. He brightened when he saw her dour face peering in the doorway, but disappointment set in immediately when she entered empty-handed.

The secretary gestured to me to follow her into the office. Comrade Dimitri Stefanescu looked me over. A new face. I felt his eyes examining the fabric of my good winter coat. Little did he know it was all I owned. I stood erect before him, meeting his gaze, hardly daring to breathe. I tried to muster as much dignity as I could. I knew how easy it would be for him to reject me as yet another unwanted deportee.

"Good day to you, Comrade," I said, addressing him in Russian. "Please allow me to introduce myself. I am Chana Twersky, the granddaughter of Rabbi Baruch Meir Twersky of Asarnitz. Once he lived in this city, with his two sons, Aaron and Mordechai, my uncles. Perhaps you remember them?"

"I knew your family," he said tonelessly, his face revealing no trace of feeling. He shifted his eyes to the stacks of papers piled high on his desk.

To him, I was just another Jew, an unwelcome intrusion into his work day. He looked weary. He had no time to reminisce with me. But wait! I had spoken to him in Russian. What other languages might I know? He looked at me sharply.

"Do you speak Russian and German?" he asked me bluntly.

"Yes, indeed," I replied. The answer he had been waiting for.

"Good, excellent," he smiled for the first time. "Please sit down," he gestured to the chair opposite his desk. "I would like you to translate for me."

He sent his secretary for paper and pens, which were handed to me with a glass of tea. I began to take dictation, translating the Russian words simultaneously into German. It would be some time before Comrade Dimitri Stefanescu would remember the Rabbis Twersky. First he needed to get some work done. We continued for several hours.

At lunch time, the secretary came in with two pieces of black bread and some pickles.

"Let's take a break," Comrade Dimitri said, handing me a slice of bread and a pickle. I held the food nervously. I saw no water to wash my hands, and I could not eat without doing so. I hastily mumbled a blessing and took a bite of the pickle, placing the bread in my pocket for later.

"You are doing a good job," the Comrade said, speaking in Russian. He was relaxed, feeling satisfied that his pile of papers was finally diminishing as we translated each document. Now he looked at me as though he were seeing a person, not just another faceless refugee. "I want you to continue working for me. Now, please tell me what I can do for you."

"I am here with a little baby and with a whole Jewish community," I said. "Our lives are in your hands. And Comrade, we can help you. Our group consists of engineers, electricians and plumbers. With their skills, the town's problems can be fixed."

Comrade Dimitri Stefanescu listened, thoughtfully chewing a morsel of the black bread.

"I am not alone here," I reminded him urgently. "We will not be allowed to remain in Mogilev unless we get work permits. We need your permission to remain here and work."

Mogilev was just one stop on the way. At least it offered a hope of survival to those permitted to remain.

"Bring your people to see me tomorrow morning," Dimitri Stefanescu said. "If they can really restore the city's services, then we will let you remain here."

"I will return tomorrow," I promised. I left the office exultant, hoping I had found a way to avoid being chased further east into the desolate towns of Transnistria.

I had been gone for many hours, and my brother waited in dismay, certain that the long hours of my absence meant that I had been detained, arrested or even killed for speaking up.

In the morning, I found the community leaders gathered on the street corner, and I hastened to tell them what had happened the previous day.

"We must go to see Comrade Dimitri Stefanescu, right now," I urged.

Our committee consisted of the former leaders of the Radautz Jewish community. There was Mendel Bitter, once the wealthy patron of the town, and Chaim Mechel, the President of the Jewish Community Center, who had organized social welfare programs. The man with the most technical knowledge was Siegfried Jegendorff, an engineer who had run a munitions factory in Austria before the Anschluss.

"We must present Comrade Dimitri with a plan to restore the city's essential services using our population to do the work," he said.

"But none of us speaks Russian," Chaim Mechel despaired.

"I do," I reminded them. "That is why he wants me to work for him."

The group fell silent as the men realized that a woman would speak for them.

We went up the dark stairs to meet with Comrad Dimitri. He outlined the city's considerable problems resulting from the bombardments and the floods. There was no electricity or running water. The old iron foundry no longer functioned.

"Can you restore these essential services to the city?" he challenged us. "I will give you one month. If you succeed, then you may stay."

Siegfrid Jegendorff confidently assured Dimitri Stefanescu that we could do it, with the help of one thousand workers, who would need housing and ration cards.

Jegendorff undertook the task of finding skilled workers and began to interview candidates and compose a list of names. Some said they were plumbers. It wasn't true, but if plumbers were needed, they would learn on the job. Their hope was rekindled, the job would keep them alive. And so we went to work, and in a month we once again had electricity and water.

Manya told us that some Jews were still living in the town, and told us where to look for them. I began knocking on the doors of the homes, searching for anyone who might have known our family, and finally found Reb Chaim, an old man who lived with one of his daughters.

I was the first Jewish woman he had seen from across the river since the revolution. In the intervening years, there had been absolutely no contact between the Jews of the Ukraine and those who had fled to Rumania and Poland. He did not know who was still alive.

"I am the daughter of Rabbi Yitzhak Twersky," I told him, "and the grand daughter of Rabbi Boruch Meir Twersky."

"Which Boruch Meir Twersky?" he asked. "The one from from Asarnitz?"

"Yes, yes, the Asarnitzer Rabbi," I said excitedly.

Reb Chaim grew pale as I spoke and he searched my face to see any resemblance I might bear to my family. He was shocked to know I even existed.

At first he didn't believe me. "What is the name of your aunt?" he asked. I told him that one of my father's sisters, my Tanta Malka, was the Trisker Rebbetzin, who lived in Lublin, Poland.

"I was your Grandfather's gabbai (assistant) in Asarnitz," Reb Chaim told me.
"And your aunt was my daughter's best friend!"

At that moment, Reb Chaim's daughter, Sarah, entered the room. Reb Chaim excitedly introduced me as Malka's neice. Soon we were exchanging stories about my Grandfather, aunts and uncles. When my connection was well-established, I was welcomed with warmth and caring. Tea was served.

"What can I do to help you?" Reb Chaim asked.

"I am here with my brother and my son. My baby is just a few months old. We have nothing. They chased us out with only what we could carry on our shoulders."

Reb Chaim's son-in-law was in charge of provisions for the town. "I'll give you a ration coupon," he said. "With this, you will receive cornmeal for you and your child."

He told me where to go. It was already growing dark when I arrived. A long line of people was waiting. I feared the supplies would be exhausted before I could reach the distribution point. Reb Chaim's son-in-law spotted me and motioned me to the head of the line. As I approached, wearing my elegant, fur-lined winter coat, the people ahead of me angrily protested the injustice of this preferential treatment.

"What are you doing?" someone yelled. "Because she wears a beautiful coat, you give to her first? Why shouldn't she wait her turn like everyone else?"

I was frightened. It seemed that the mob wanted to lynch me, just for trying to find food for my starving child.

I returned to Manya's home carrying a precious sack of cereal, from which she took enough to cook into a meal for us. Manya had taken the towels I was using for diapers and washed them. David was more comfortable in the clean linens, and he was able to take in some nourishment from the grain. Cradling my son in

my arms, I felt blessed by the new friends I had made and by the hope that we would be remaining in Mogilev.

I did not know what the future would bring, but compared with the people I saw around me, I felt fortunate and blessed, protected by the merits of our holy ancestors, who had walked the same stones of these streets and who were surely interceding with the Almighty on our behalf.

They did not erect death camps in Transnistria, but the results were just as cruel and uncertain. People died slow, agonising deaths by starvation and disease. Scarlet fever and typhus raged. There was no medicine in the clinic. Food was scarce, and shelter inadequate. The unsanitary conditions made it difficult to wash. Lice crawled on almost every head. Some transmitted typhus. Rats and mice roamed freely. During the first, particularly bitter winter of 1941, thousands of people perished. For many months, the ground was too frozen to dig graves, and the corpses of the dead were piled up to wait for the spring thaws, when mass graves were dug.

My work permit entitled me to living quarters. I was assigned an upstairs classroom in an abandoned school building, an empty room with no furniture, no glass in the windows or doorway into the hall. We slept on the bare wooden floor, in our winter coats. It was miserably cold. We put wooden boards in the windows to keep out the wind. It was raining and snowing.

The school building in which we had our room, was located near a small woods. Aaron said he would go find some kindling wood, to make a fire for heat and on which I could cook. Manya had given us a small pot. Aaron went out into the night woods. He was gone a long time. The baby was cold and hungry, and I had nothing for him. He cried pitifully. I cradled my infant to me, trying to give him the warmth of my body, singing to him, trying to soothe him. Finally Aaron returned carrying an armful of branches. He was dishevelled and his clothes were torn. He was bleeding.

"What on earth happened to you?" I gasped when I saw him stagger in.

"It is illegal to take wood from the forest," he managed to say. "Some German soldiers caught me. They beat me, and tore my sidecurls out of my face. I'm lucky they didn't kill me."

I went outside for snow to wash my brother's injured face. I decided it would be safer to keep his presence a secret from the authorities. He would stay home with David while I worked. Our first meal in our little room was a dreadful whisper of what was to come, yet we had succeeded in arranging shelter and work. Most of the Jews who came through Mogilev were not so fortunate. Without work and residence permits, they were pushed deeper into the countryside, where thousands perished of starvation, frostbite and disease in that first severe winter of 1941. Their deaths were slow and agonising. Sometimes I wonder whose deaths were easier? Those who were exterminated swiftly, or those who slowly starved or succumbed to disease? We survived four cruel winters in Transnistria.

Just as we promised, our committee succeeded in repairing much of the damage in Mogilev. Soon the iron foundry went back into production, and because of my baby, the first cook-stove produced was given to me, to keep him warm.

We stayed in that windowless, dilapidated school building for about a year, then moved to a little house in a worker's ghetto not far from the foundry. I continued to work for Comrade Dimitri during our first year in Mogilev, until I was re-assigned a job supervising the worker's kitchen in the ghetto. I made the meal plans for the workers and ladled out the soups we made, which consisted of water, vegetables and a little horse meat.

One night, I had just finished ladling out the supper. Usually, I would sit down for a few moments by the oven after work. On this particular evening, I thought I heard David crying. I decided to go check on him. Not more than five minutes after I left, the oven exploded. Many people in the kitchen were killed. Others were badly burned. Everyone was sure that I, too, had perished in the explosion. But G-d was watching out for me. I had escaped.

Comrade Dimitri told me where to find the house where my uncles once lived. It was painted blue and had been bombed. I brought Aaron with me. As we searched the ruins of the house, we found a hole in the wall of a hallway.

"Let's see what is in here," my brother suggested. Inside the wall, we found two Torah scrolls! What a treasure! We carefully brought them back to our room. We kept those scrolls with us all during the war. We made a little synagogue in one of the rooms of the school building. I used my Sabbath tablecloth, which was in my rucksack when we were deported, as a mechitza, dividing the women's from the men's section. On Yom Kippur, we had a big crowd for yizkor, the memorial prayer for the dead. The workers were allowed to leave the factory for that prayer. One of Torah scrolls was later vandalised. We had to bury it in the geniza of Mogilev's Jewish cemetery. The other came with us to America, where we donated it to a yeshiva in New York.

The foundry employed our people as slave labor. They toiled for twelve or fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. In return, their work permits earned them privilege of remaining in the ghetto. They were fed in the foundry, where I supervised the kitchen. Somebody accused me of giving out food to people who weren't employed in the foundry. This was against the law. I was called to a meeting and put on trial. Siegfried Jeggendorff presided at my trial, which was attended by the committee.

"What do you have to say to these charges?" he asked me, his voice stern, his military bearing erect and imposing.

"There is no comment," I replied. "What you say is true. I do give out food to people who don't belong there. But I invite you to come and see these hungry people. If you see them and can then say not to give them the food which remains in the bottom of the pot when the workers have finished eating, then I will say halleluya. But for the time being, I still have humanity in my heart. When I see those people, whatever is left, I give to them. I pray to G-d every day that I should not lose my human feelings here, because all around me I see people losing their sense of compassion."

There was total silence in the room as I spoke my defense. A discussion ensued. Some members of the committee felt that what I did was wrong. Others agreed that we must still keep our compassion and help the needy. A vote was taken.

"Perhaps we misunderstood," Siegfried Jengendorff conceded. "We thought you were taking food away from the workers. Now we understand that you only gave leftovers. Your explanation is accepted by the committee, and the charge is withdrawn. We have decided that you should continue to administer the kitchen."

I myself never ate the food from the kitchen. It was not kosher. We cooked in our little room. Instead of bread, we often dined on "Mamaliga," a corn-meal porridge cooked in boiling water. It was easy and quick to prepare and did not require baking. For sugar, we roasted white beets, and to maintain our health we ate raw garlic, our "natural antibiotic."

Before the holiday of Passover, Aaron and I discussed what we could do to "change" our room for the holiday. We had no dishes to change.

"I have an idea!" I suddenly cried.

"Yes, Chana?" my brother, said, catching my excitement. "Tell me, what is your idea?"

"See that broom over there?" I asked, pointing to the broom in the corner of our room.

"Yes, I see it," Aaron replied.

"Move it to the other wall," I commanded, pointing to its new, Passover place.

How we laughed that day, grateful to still have a remnant of our sense of humor, even there. Our next-door neighbor was a baker, who managed to bake us matzos for our Passover seder.

David was just a baby then, perhaps a year old. When I was working, my brother Aaron would watch him for me, or one of the neighbors. Everyone loved David. He was the only baby in Mogilev. Sometimes, when I see young babies, a wistful regret overcomes me, to think that I never had the privilege of enjoying my son's childhood.

When my little boy had typhus, he was burning with fever and covered with oozing sores. There was no medicine, nothing to do for him. How could I let my baby die? I sent for Doctor Weinstein, who examined my baby and shook his head sadly.

"I don't think he will make it until the morning," he said.

"Doctor," I pleaded. "Have you no medicine for my child?"

"No, nothing," the doctor replied. "I am sorry. There is no hope. Only if he lives until morning, you may hope again."

I had to find a way to bring the fever down. I had nothing. Only snow. All night, I ran outside to find snow and ice, melting them against the terrible fever.

In the morning, the doctor returned, and little David was still alive. He had made it through the night.

I had a nightgown from my wedding trousseau in my rucksack. I sold the nightgown to a peasant woman, and used the money to buy bread and oil. The bread we ate. David's sores didn't heal. All winter, he suffered horribly from malnutrition. I soaked some rags in the oil and applied them to my baby's sores. When I removed the dressings, his skin came off. He was miserable, but he rarely cried. Somehow, he seemed to know not to, or perhaps he was too weak to protest.

I was walking outdoors when I saw a nut tree, the first tree to get a new coat of leaves at the approach of spring. The day was brisk and cold. Everything was etched sharply into focus, and the leaves, as I regarded them, seemed to

beckon to me. All during that endless day, the tree stood in my mind's eye with a supernal light surrounding it.

I remembered a story from my father's Sabbath table, when he sat for the third meal with his Hasidim telling stories and singing songs long into the afternoon, prolonging the Sabbath day into evening. The story was about the leaves of the Tree of Life. An incantation began to form in my mind. Take the leaves and boil them. Make an essence to bathe the baby's sores. He will be healed.

This was surely not the Tree of Life, this walnut tree in Mogilev. But where else would I find medicine? I had nothing to lose by trying.

I collected some leaves and boiled them in melted snow until a strong concoction was brewed. When it cooled, I made compresses to wash my son. Indeed, a miracle occurred. The sores began to heal.

From where did this knowledge come to me, to make a healing potion from the leaves of that walnut tree? Whose voice had cried out, saving my life from the kitchen explosion?

This was surely the *Yad Hashem* - the Hand of the Almighty - reaching out to sustain me in the midst of my suffering. I have always felt the Hand of G-d guiding and protecting me, intervening on my behalf. No matter how bad things got, I felt the Hand of G-d sustaining me.

I often went walking by the river. There, it was quiet, and I could collect my thoughts. Once, after visiting a man who was dying, his feet blue and swollen, I went to the river for solace, knowing he would soon be dead and there was nothing I could do to help him.

Somehow, it came to me. There, in that place, on the banks of the Dniester River which ran through Mogilev as though there were no boundaries. A poem: *Mein Stern in Himeln*. My star in the sky is ... extinguished. It is gone. I am standing on the ground, my head bowed. When I remember to search the sky, I no longer see it..." I wrote this poem and forgot it. Then one day, many years later, suddenly it returned to me. The words of that poem must have been

burned into my heart. Even that day, when I wrote my poem, my star in heaven is ... gone.

One night - it was the eleventh of Kislev - two weeks before Chanukah - I had a dream. In the dream, my father told me that he was dying. In the morning, I said to my brother: " Aaron, I dreamt that Father told me he is dying."

"I will say tehilim for him," Aaron said. "I will write down the date."

After the war, I met someone from the second transport from Radautz, which was sent to Abodovka. If only I had been on that transport, I would have seen my family again! This man had been with my father when he died.

"Your father made me promise, if I survived, to find you and tell you the date of his yahrzeit," the man said. "It is the eleventh of Kislev."

And so, that is when I light candles for my family, for Mama and for my father, for my sister Rivka and for my brother Shimon, who starved to death and left me a starless sky.

Only one star remained, my little child, my David, who never knew his father, who never had grandparents, who lived without crying all the years we were there. The only baby in Mogilev. His angels were working overtime guarding his soul.

We survived with G-d's help. Because I knew so many languages, I could work, translating from Russian into German. Because I could work, we could eat. Not much, but enough to keep body and soul together, enough to keep our faith.

There were so many coincidences. Now, looking back, it's all so clear to me. This was the Hand of G-d, who placed the stars in the vault of heaven, and who watches out for me.

Liberation

March, 1944

We moved into the cellar in the spring, to be safe from the air raids. The German retreat was punctuated by bombings. We kept track of the war on a penciled map, explaining to David where each army was. It seemed symbolic that Uman was reached on Purim. The war between the Russians and the Germans caught us in the middle. The Germans had been advancing toward Petersburg in their bid to take over all of Russia. They wanted Leningrad. That beautiful city was nearly destroyed. But then they were defeated. The Russians chased the Germans out. Our camp was on the front line. In the hastiness of their retreat, the Germans abandoned whole trainloads of provisions which were on their way from Russia back to Germany.

We spent those weeks in hiding, huddled in the cold, dark cellar. Sometimes people ventured out in search of food or water, got caught in a bombing raid and were killed. We slept in our clothing, in case we would need to run to save our lives. Sometimes it was very quiet, but then came the flood lights, just before the next bombardment.

When the Germans retreated, the Russians took over the region. On March 19, 1944 Russian partisans arrived in town. They had been fighting in the countryside.

That afternoon, as we sat in our room, three soldiers in German uniform walked in. I was sure that the our end had come. The last moment of my life. But it turned out they were not German. They were Russian partisans in German clothing, and they had come to help us!

I broke out in such a cry. I will never, ever forget that scene.

"Be quiet," the partisan said to me. "We are not German soldiers, we are only wearing their clothes. We are partisans, from Russia. We are real people. We are not what you thought. "

During the long years of the war, the partisans had worn out their clothes. When they reached Mogilev and found the Germans had abandoned their warehouses full of food and clothing, the partisans took new clothes. This caused much confusion in the street. Sometimes, mistaking the partisans for Germans because of their clothes, the Russians killed each other.

These young partisans brought food to us and helped us. When they saw David, they wept to see a living child. Two of them were Jewish.

On the night of our liberation, the sky was filled with parachutes dropping supplies. All that lovely, soft silk. We used it to make shirts and clothing.

We were liberated from the Germans, but the war still continued. Hungarian Jews were still being deported to concentration camps, but in Mogilev we were already free.

After the liberation, we stayed on in Mogilev. There was no place else to go, and there was no way out. The bridge had been destroyed in the bombings. We had to wait for the bridge to be rebuilt, so we could cross the river. Nor were the Rumanians generous with us. They kept the border closed.

This made us want to return even more to the homes we had been forced to leave. Although our lives had been destroyed and our dear ones had been killed, we still wanted to go back to where we once came from, before they deported us. We yearned to leave the town of our imprisonment, even though going back meant facing the pain and the tears.

For another four months we continued living in Mogilev. The Germans left a lot of provisions in their warehouses. Sacks of coffee beans, salt, bread and margarine. The provision trains were ours to take from. There were warehouses full of clothing. I took from there a little German coat and made it into a coat for David, so he wouldn't be cold any more.

Our cousins in Chernovitz heard we survived and were living in Mogilev. They sent word to come visit them there, and as soon as the bridge was rebuilt, Aaron made the first journey. In Chernovitz, Aaron was discussing with the cousins

how he could begin to make a little money to rebuild our life. He bought some sewing needles and thread, thinking he could sell them in Mogilev. Our cousin, Bushka, traveled with him. In the train, he put the parcel containing the goods on the overhead shelf. After a while, one of the conductors came and took down the parcel, examining its contents.

"To whom does this parcel belong?" he asked my cousin, Bushka, thinking it was hers.

Instead of saying she did not know, Bushka pointed to Aaron and said: "It is his."

"Don't you know it is illegal to bring goods to sell?" the railroad official thundered, calling for soldiers to arrest my brother. At the next stop, they took him off the train and put him into prison.

Bushka arrived in Mogilev without Aaron. She did not know where he was being held.

I left David in her care and went to inquire where my brother could be. Finally I found a military camp which contained a prison. I found the barracks of the women soldiers and asked if I could sleep there.

"You may sleep on the floor," one of the soldiers told me.

That night, I overheard one of the women soldiers speaking with her boyfriend outside the window. The next day, I asked her if she would like me to tell her fortune.

Eagerly, she held out her hand. I repeated many things which I had overheard the previous evening. She was so impressed that she let me stay another night in the barracks. She told me that at five o'clock in the morning, the prisoners would be allowed into the yard to wash. If my brother was among them, I would be able to see him.

I awoke early in the morning and went to the fence of the prison yard. Sure enough, the prisoners began to fill the yard, and over in the corner was Aaron.

"Aaron! Aaron!" I yelled.

He came over to the fence and we exchanged a few words before the guards whisked him away.

I made an appointment to see the commanding officer in charge of the prison. He would see me in the afternoon. I knew it was the second day of Shavuot, when we make the yizkor prayer to remember the dead. I sat beneath a tree and began to speak to my parents, praying for them to intercede on behalf of my brother.

"I know that today is yizkor," I said to my parents. "May these words of mine be my prayer today. Your beloved son is in grave danger. Please, help me find the right utterance to gain his freedom!"

When I met the commanding officer, his uniform covered with medals, I told him my story. "Aaron is all I have in the whole world," I pleaded. "Please, can't you let him go?"

The officer laughed. "Our minimum sentence is five years," he said.

Again I spoke, and something I said went into his heart, because then he told me: "I understand your predicament. I, too, am a Jew. I will do what I can for your brother. But you must run away from here quickly, and go as far as you can."

Thanking him, I made my way to the railroad tracks, and hopped onto a train full of soldiers going in the direction of Mogilev. Soon my brother also returned and we were reunited once more.

We left Mogilev as soon as we could to make our way back to Rumania. The trains would stop for days at a time, not moving. We slept in vacant houses, anywhere we could put our heads down. It took two weeks to get to Chernovitz, a large city in the province of Bukhovina. There, we found our three Twersky cousins who had survived. Their parents, brothers and sisters had been killed,

but it was a wonderful reunion, to see that at least a few of my uncle's children, two sisters and one brother, had survived.

We arrived in Chernovitz on a Friday, and David's eyes grew round in delight when he saw the table in our cousin's apartment. He danced around and around the table.

"Why are you dancing around the table?" I asked him.

David was used to being in a tiny, cramped room, where everything was small and confined. He had never seen a big table before. So he was dancing around the table, singing in German: "Look, Mutti, a big house, a big room, and a big table!" He was so happy to be in a big room, to be alive and to dance in that big, open space of freedom.

We made a little *cheder* there in Chernovitz. David was three years old. There were two or three other children, who had survived in hiding.

For a time, we were happy to be together, living with our cousins in their house. We were like children together, and there was a great love and devotion between us. Then we found an empty apartment, whose owners had not returned. Chernovitz had once been a beautiful city, with a vibrant Jewish community, with yeshivas. All gone. We were comfortable in that beautiful apartment, and stayed there several months.

Although we had been liberated, the war continued. The Russians were in power. They were the occupiers. In the morning, people sang the Russian national anthem on their way to work. The Russians needed workers to clean up and rebuild. They came and took people away to work like slaves. People were afraid to walk out on the street, afraid they would be caught and disappear. People were being sent to Russia to help with the aftermath of the war.

One Friday, I sent my brother to buy some sugar, and he didn't return. Frantic, I started looking for him. He had been arrested. In despair, I went to the authorities. Luckily, I spoke Russian. When I came to that office, I began to cry. I

wanted my brother out. They wanted to put him to work. I said that he could report to work after the Sabbath. We had established a little synagogue, and he was the Rabbi. We needed him for the Sabbath. They freed him.

One day, on Shabbat, some Russian soldiers came into our apartment. They had heard there was beautiful furniture there. They came in and took everything away. They said they were in power and could do as they pleased. I had no right to protest. So we slept on the floor. That was the Russian occupation.

In any case, we had not intended to remain in Chernovitz. That was not our goal. We stayed only until we could arrange to go further, to Radautz. We walked or caught rides, traveling by horse and buggy, from town to town. It was a horrible experience to come to those villages and not find any Jews. Nobody had survived. None returned.

We arrived in Radautz on a Thursday. It was the day that Franklin Roosevelt passed away. We Jews thought of Roosevelt as our Messiah. It was the day before the Sabbath, and we had no food; we had no bread. We had nothing for supper, and we were hungry. I had heard that the Jewish community was baking bread, and went to get a ration coupon, so I could get some challah for our Sabbath meal. I saw a very long line of people, hundreds of people, all waiting for bread. I said to myself, I would rather go hungry than wait in this long line in the cold weather for a little bread. I decided to go home. Before leaving the line, I gave my bread coupon to a man there, saying "Here, you take my certificate." It was morning. I didn't want to wait until ten o'clock at night for the bread. I left, and we had no bread for the Sabbath.

That night, around 11 o'clock, somebody knocked on the door. We were very, very frightened.

"Who is it?" I asked.

A man's voice answered, calling me by name. "I have brought bread for you," he said.

I opened the door and saw the man from the bread line.

"How did you know who I am?" I asked him.

"I recognized you from Mogilev," he replied. "You helped me there. It is because of you that I am alive today. I have never forgotten you."

I looked closely at the man but did not recognize him. "How could I have helped you?" I asked.

"We were on one of the transports through Mogilev," he replied. "You were the one who distributed bread. You were the one who gave bread to me and my wife. I will never, ever forget."

The man finished speaking with tears in his eyes. "Now it is my turn to give bread to you."

It was true that I had distributed bread to the transports, when people from other camps were sent through Mogilev to be freed. He must have been on one of those transports. There were so many hundreds of people. We baked bread to help them. Many were trying to return to Rumania. Others were going on to Palestine on illegal boats. Some of those were children's transports. We heard later. Many who passed through Mogilev made it onto an illegal boat, which the Germans sank. They all drowned, all those children. So tragic. This man had not gone on with that group. He had continued to Rumania, and made his way to Radautz, where we met again.

When we arrived at last in Radautz, I went into my house. There was nothing there. Nothing. Every piece of furniture was gone. The whole place had been emptied of its contents. I heard that a friend of ours had taken my furniture. He was an assistant to the Mayor. They told me he had taken everything away. I went to the authorities, and found out that he left a declaration of everything he had taken. It was all recorded in City Hall. I got the papers. The man had left town, but I got his new address and wrote to him. His wife answered. She said that her husband had died during the war, but that she still had all the furniture. I could come any time to get it. But what would I do with furniture? I wasn't interested in furniture. The war was still going on, and I knew I wouldn't stay in

Radautz. What would I do there? Just live with memories of what once had been? I walked through the empty rooms of my house and felt I didn't belong there. It was so painful. I could hear voices there. In the attic, I found some of our books.

Before we left, I had hidden some of our silver wedding gifts under the ground in the cellar beneath our bedroom. There were my Sabbath candlesticks, some little coffee spoons, and some silver spice boxes for Havdalah, shaped like little houses. When I found them again, I cried bitterly. How could this be all that was left of my childhood and marriage?

We wrote letters, trying to discover who had survived. We wrote to our cousins in America, to tell them we were alive. We never returned to Beltz. Beltz had been one of the first cities to be bombed, and the city was destroyed. The man who had told me the date of my father's death also told me that we had silver and other valuables buried beneath the house, but I couldn't bring myself to go back there. To see my childhood home in ruins, destroyed, and all the people I loved vanished, killed. Perhaps, if there was a grave, a place to visit, I might have gone there. But it seemed the whole city was a grave, its murdered inhabitants in anonymous burial sites throughout Eastern Europe.

I found out that my uncle, my mother's brother, Rabbi Chanoch Ashkenazi, from Berlad, was living in Bucharest. We decided to go there, together with the Chernovitz cousins. My uncle had survived, together with his wife and two children. He was a great Rabbi, a *tzaddik*. One of his sons was still in Russia. Three other children had been killed in Poland. My aunt and uncle were heartbroken, but they showered love and attention on us.

They were living in Berlad, where my Grandfather lived, when the war broke out. When the war started, they escaped from Berlad and came to Bucharest, the capital of Rumania. The Jews of Bucharest were never deported, and they were able to remain there throughout the war.

There was little to eat in Bucharest; there were food shortages. But we had a sense of extended family, with our Chernovitz cousins and my uncle's family. When David turned four years old, they made a festive birthday party for him, in

the garden. I found a little house on a street called Alba Yulia, number 24. There was a garden in the back yard. We planted vegetables there, tomatoes, squash, radishes, onions, and flowers, which we cut for the Sabbath table. David had his own little shovel. He dug in the dirt, planted the seeds, and watched, for the first time in his life, the miracle of living things growing. In Bucharest, a sense of normalcy slowly was returning to our lives. My sisters-in-law, Koka and Rosa came to join us there. Their mother, Judith, had died in Mogilev. There was no funeral for her, she died like so many others, during the first winter, of cold and starvation. They carted her body away with the bodies of the others who died there.

Little by little, the survivors found each other, got together, made warm ties. We spent every Shabbos with my uncle and his family.

I went shopping for soap and came home with a small parcel. When I opened it, I noticed the initials "RJF" carved on the soap. What does this mean, I wondered? I thought perhaps it was the name of the factory which produced the soap. Someone told me that the initials stood for "Rhein Judische Fleisch," "pure Jewish fat." The soap had been rendered from the fat of the victims of the concentration camps. Stunned and horrified, I hurried the Rabbi and asked what I should do with this package of soap.

"Yes, we are aware of this problem," the Rabbi assured me. "You may take it to the cemetery for burial. And beware, they are also selling lampshades made of Jewish skin."

Other people came into our lives again. Our cousins, the Levanons, who now live in Haifa, in Israel. Friends from Beltz, the Zismans, who told us that when my father advised them to run away, they listened to him and ran. They were so grateful. We heard the same story many times. My father had told people to leave, and they followed his advice, but he didn't want to abandon the remnant of his community. He stayed with them, and he died.

It was a relief to be in Bucharest, which seemed a paradise in comparison with Radautz. We began to think of the future. We placed announcements of our survival in the Jewish papers. Friends, the Haratz family, whom we knew from

childhood, wrote from Venezuela, inviting us to come there. They sent us \$300. An uncle wrote from Palestine, again with an invitation. When our cousins, Rabbi Heschel and Rebbetzin Rikela Eichenstein in St. Louis read in the paper that we had survived, they sent us a hundred dollars and an official sponsorship to come to America.

I still had to settle the matter of the furniture. It was in Brashow, a picturesque town near Bucharest, in the mountains. The woman had said I could come for it any time. But what would I do with all that furniture? I was not going to establish a home in Bucharest. Nevertheless, I went to Brashow, to the address of the woman with my possessions. She remembered me from Radautz. I walked into her home and saw all my beautiful furniture. The black dining room set with the plush, red velvet upholstery, the heavy bedroom set, the white kitchen cupboards with red trim, my carpets and some paintings. I looked at all those beautiful furnishings from the beginning of my marriage. I really didn't know what to do with them.

I went for a walk and saw a woman who looked Jewish. I knew the Vishnitzer Rebbe was in Brashow, so I went up to her and asked if she knew where he was living. When she saw me, she burst out in tears.

"Why are you crying?" I asked her.

"I remember you from the camp in Mogilev," she said. "You were the soup lady. When I came to the kitchen in the foundry, you gave me soup. You saved my life."

I also began to cry. We were remembering when they wanted to fire me because I was giving soup to the poor people. The woman took me to the Vishnitzer Rebbe and told him the story, praising me until we all wept.

The Rebbe advised me to return to Bucharest, to hire movers and put the furniture into storage until I sold it. It was good advice. The second time I went to Brashow, I brought my son with me, and I hired a moving company to bring the furniture to Bucharest. There, I sold the furniture. We had money, but the war was still going on.

I was on a bus one day, when I heard a lot of commotion. People were running, hollering, waving flags. The sounds frightened me. I didn't know what had happened. I thought perhaps a revolution had broken out. Then I heard the reason for the noise. The war had ended. It was V-Day. Peace had been declared.

All around me, people were celebrating. But I had the opposite feeling. I was very sad, unbearably sad, not wanting to accept the fact that I had lost all those who were so dear to me. How could anyone celebrate? I came home, dazed. There was a glass door in the house. I didn't see the glass. I thought the door was open, and I walked right into it, breaking the glass. As the glass shattered, I was jolted to the core of my being. I was ashamed to have broken the glass, and didn't want to tell my relatives I had done it.

All I had left at the end of the war was my son and my brother. Everyone else was gone. My parents, my brother, my sister. I knew they would never come back. How could I live without them in the world? I felt so alone. I told my uncle, "don't let anyone in. I don't want to see anyone." I closed the curtains and sat for days in the darkened room. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. I paced restlessly in that room, unable to even sit in a chair. My aunt and uncle came into the room, coaxing me to eat, encouraging me to return to myself. As I sank deeper into the depression, I no longer wanted to live. I sat in that room, crying, weeping. I was mourning for all those who had perished, but I didn't realize it. I cried for each person who died, weeping tears I had not shed in all the years we were in Mogilev.

Finally, I remembered my son. He was, after all, the reason I should go on living. I had pity on David. Because of him, I found the strength to continue. After many days of being depressed and not wanting to see anyone, I began to come out of it and think about our future.

I went to see my cousin, the Skvirer Rebbe, a Twersky cousin who had lived in Yasse before the war and escaped to Bucharest, where he survived with his family. He knew me and my family. He was about to marry off his oldest daughter to the son of the Vishnitzer Rebbe.

The wedding was the first family simcha after the war ended. It was held in the great synagogue in Bucharest. I found myself unable to join in the atmosphere of rejoicing. Instead, I cried for all the wedding guests who were not there. I felt weighted down like a stone. Why did I merit to survive and attend this simcha when so many righteous souls did not? It was impossible to experience the joy of the simcha, so soon after all that had befallen us. Sadly, shortly after the wedding, the bride got sick and despite my efforts to obtain penicillin for her, she died. The groom later married her sister.

It was time to leave Rumania, but the borders were sealed. The closest border was with Czechoslovakia. We had no documents, no passports, no papers to prove who we were. I went to the Jewish community center to arrange for papers to be issued, verifying our names and dates of birth. We would have to cross the border illegally.

I went to ask the Skvirer Rebbe for his blessing on our dangerous journey.

"Go with courage," the Rabbi said. "G-d will help you."

We left everything behind, all the possessions we had accumulated while we were in Bucharest, and traveled by train to the city of Satmar in Transylvania. Satmar was a beautiful city. There we met other survivors, heartbroken people who found no relatives. Every survivor was like a diamond, one of G-d's wonder children. We were also among them.

Satmar was near the Rumanian-Hungarian border, which was sealed by the Russians. We made arrangements to smuggle ourselves across the border. We organized a group of ten people to travel together, and hired smugglers to guide us into Hungary. We left in the middle of the night, walking on foot, carrying what luggage we could manage. In my rucksack, the Torah scroll we found in Mogilev was rolled up and wrapped in a towel. Aaron carried David on his shoulders. It was November, and already the cold of winter pressed into the mountains. We walked until we came to the border. On one side was Rumania, with Russian soldiers guarding the border. On the other side, there were the Hungarians. Dogs were barking, and we prayed they wouldn't find us.

It was windy, cold and dark, but we had flashlights. We had to cross a river. The smuggler went in first, and we had to follow him. We were up to our waistlines in the water at night. There was a blind man in our group, who sang songs to David. He sang: "David, David, with each step, you are going to Israel."

Finally, we reached the other side of the river, where we were met by another group of smugglers, waiting for us with a wagon. We clambered into the wagon and rested, shivering, as we continued to travel. At about four o'clock in the morning, we heard soldiers coming. We were very frightened, but the soldiers didn't find us. We came to a stream, remaining in the wagon as it attempted to cross. It was too heavy, and the wagon overturned. We fell out into the water. It was unbelievable that nobody was hurt. We helped right the wagon and push it out of the river to the other side.

The smugglers took us to the home of a middle-aged Jew, the only person in his family to survive. When he saw David, he thought of his own children, who were all killed in the war, and at once, he opened his home to our group, taking us in and caring for us. Remembering this kind, sad-eyed man, I can still feel the warmth of his blankets. He fed us hot tea and soup. It was Thursday night. On Friday, we got up and washed ourselves, trying to clean up for the Sabbath. We walked into the village, which was a great mistake. Our host brought food to us, and we made kiddush with his wine. We had a Sabbath meal together.

We were in Hungary, on the other side of the border, but we were still very far from Prague. We would have to cross yet another border, the Czech border, and travel several hundred more miles. It was Friday night, and everyone had gone to sleep. Suddenly, we heard knocking on the door. Hungarian soldiers came in. They had heard about us from the villagers. They said they had orders to send us back. The people in our group were frantic. We didn't know what to do. They said we would have to go back to Rumania, to jail, because we had left the country illegally.

I don't remember what I said. Words came into my mouth. G-d gave me the courage to speak. I shmeared them. I took out some Rumanian money, a lot of money, and gave it to them. They took the bribe and left, telling us not to show

ourselves in the streets. They told us not to stay in that village, that we must leave and go farther on. When they left, the people in our group began to cry. What would become of us?

About an hour later, some contacts arrived with a car to take us further. The car had broken down, and they were already a day late.

"We cannot delay," they said. "Although it is the middle of the night, you must leave now. Otherwise you will all be in trouble."

I took David and our little rucksack. "I will go," I said.

My brother, Aaron, said he would not travel on the Sabbath. In any case, there was no room for him in the transport. He told us to go on ahead, promising to meet us on Sunday, after the Sabbath. And so we left him there.

We passed through the town of Kleimberdine, and traveled deeper into Hungary, always moving toward the Czech border. We were taken to the schochet's house in one village. It was the middle of the Sabbath, and he took us in. He had slaughtered chickens for Shabbos, and he fed us some of his meat. He saw David and said "a miracle child." There were so few children left alive at the end of the war. So few. He cared for us, gave us a bath, fed us. We were exhausted. We were grateful for the opportunity to rest. After the Sabbath, I realised that all my money was in the lining of my coat, which I had left with my brother. I had no money, and my brother had not arrived. Some of the group kept moving on, but I had no money to pay the smuggler guide. No money for the man who cared for us. Sunday came, and Monday. There was no sign of Aaron. I waited for days. I was in a terrible predicament. I couldn't go out looking for him, I couldn't risk exposing myself to public view. I was an illegal alien. I could be reported to the authorities and sent back to prison in Rumania.

By Thursday, I was so frantic that I began to risk going to the train station, to see if my brother would arrive by train. Still, no sign of him. What had happened? I trembled with worry.

Finally, he arrived. I barely recognized him. He was wearing peasant clothes, otherwise he couldn't have left the village. His had tucked his sidelocks into a peasant's cap. I was standing in the train station when he walked up to me. I will never forget our unbelievable reunion. This was on Thursday, and the next day a smuggler was coming to take us to Czechoslovakia. We asked him to wait until Saturday night, after the Sabbath, and he agreed. He put us together with another group of people, and we negotiated his price.

Again, we were walking mile after mile. Then another smuggler came with a car, and we traveled the whole night. Finally, early Sunday morning, we arrived at the Czech border. We came to Kashau, a community where most of the Jews had perished. You could count the survivors on the ten fingers of your hands. We were lucky to find one woman there, a survivor, who welcomed us into her home. The pictures of her family were still hanging on the wall, but she was the only one who survived. All her furniture was still there, but not the family. It was so tragic. She sat there with her memories.

From there, we took a train to Prague. Bedraggled in our heavy coats, we looked like beggars. In Prague, we met other survivors. We all stayed in the same hotel, the Regina Hotel. We bought a little hot plate, so we could cook there. We wrote to notify our relatives where we were, telling them that we wanted to get out of Europe. My cousin, Rikela Eichenstein, from St. Louis wrote at once, sending us an official affidavit inviting us to come to America.

Prague was an open city in those days. People were coming from America and all over the West to start in business. It was part of the free world. Those who had dollars could buy everything. There were stylish clothes to buy, and kosher meat. Best of all, they had fruit, oranges. I hadn't seen an orange the whole time we were in Mogilev. An orange is unheard of in a concentration camp. How we enjoyed those oranges!

Prague is an ancient, historic city, of great beauty. Jews have lived there since the middle ages, great Rabbis like the Maharal and writers, like Franz Kafka. There was a Zionist convention going on in Carlsbad, with delegates from all over the world passing through Prague on their way. We made many new

friends and went to parties, to the theater, to the movies. It was the beginning of normal life.

I had sold my furniture, and I had some dollars sent from abroad, but that was all I had. I bought some clothes, a new coat with fur trim. It was very important to me to be well-groomed, to regain my sense of dignity. David was learning the Czech language, and he knew German. Wherever we went, people loved my little son, and lavished attention on him.

We remained in Prague for a year and a half, from November, 1945 until March, 1947. The most wonderful day of my life was when we got our tickets to come to the United States. They were sent by my cousin, Rickela, the daughter of my father's sister, one of my closest living relatives. I will always be grateful to her, eternally grateful, for bringing us to America. She told us to stay in Prague until we got the papers, made the visas, and received the tickets. It was all settled there.

We left Prague by train for Göttesberg, Sweden, where we waited for our boat. While there, we visited a camp where girls who had survived were convalescing in a Red Cross sanatorium. There, I met some young women my age, eighteen, twenty, twenty-two years old.

We boarded the boat on a cold, gray Friday. It was the first time in my life I saw a big ship, or the ocean. I worried what we would eat on board. I had seen oranges in Göttesberg, so I went to buy some oranges, and some chocolate. We were always afraid of going hungry. It was a horrible feeling, hunger. As we boarded the ship, my paper bag, in which I was carrying the oranges, broke. All the oranges rolled away. I crawled after them on my knees, but when I found some, I had nothing to put them in. I was so sad to lose those beautiful oranges. But even if I'd had them, I wouldn't have been able to eat them.

I was seasick the whole voyage. We lit Sabbath candles on the ship. That is the only warm memory I have of our entire journey. Most of the time I was unbearably sick, and so weary of moving from place to place, of being chased from one place to another. I told my brother: "I am dreaming of sleeping in one

bed for six months." After all our wanderings, I longed for a sense of permanence in our life.

They tried to make us comfortable in the little cabins of the old ship, but the weather was depressing. On the deck, sheets of rain fell endlessly. It was as though G-d himself was crying. I was seasick, and there was no medication to relieve the nausea. Many of us suffered. We were all gloomy, sad, wet, cold and seasick. We had to stay in the cabin.

As we sailed into New York harbor, the passengers became very excited. They were singing and dancing. But I had a different feeling. I felt sad. I looked at my brother, standing with David, and began to cry, in loud sobs that went unheard into the wind. I didn't know where I was going, what would come next.

There had been so many voyages. Journeys made with a heavy heart, to unknown destinations. We didn't have hope, not yet, but there was a small change. I felt, once more, *yad Hashem*, the hand of G-d leading me to my destiny. Perhaps we would succeed in rebuilding our lives.

We docked and disembarked, went through passport control and were examined by the health authorities. We emerged into a terminal where everyone had someone to meet them. Everyone but us. Our cousins had written that we were arriving so close to Passover, they would be unable to meet us.

All around us, people were being greeted. I watched, feeling empty. There was nobody to welcome us. We had arrived in a country where I didn't know the language or the people. I felt so very sad. Suddenly, to my surprise, I heard our names being called. I said to my brother: "Someone is calling our names, but it must be a mistake, because we do not know anyone here."

"Twersky! Twersky! Chana! Aaron Twersky!" they were calling.

When we came closer, we saw a whole delegation of Rabbis, young and old, together with their families. They were our cousins! My cousin, the Chief Rabbi of St. Louis, had told them to come and to meet us.

We were deeply moved. My brother and I were crying for joy. They put us up at the Rex, a Jewish hotel, where we found comfortable accommodations. As I stood at my window, I looked across and saw a man standing in the building next door. "Look," I said to my brother. "Doesn't that look just like Rabbi Yoel Ashkenazi, the Yasse Rav?"

"Chana," my brother said to me. "That surely is the Yasse Rav."

We began shouting, louder and louder, until the man looked at our window.

When he saw us, he looked shocked, then excited. "You are alive?" he exclaimed. He hadn't known we survived.

"Yes, we answered. We are alive."

"Where are you?" he asked.

"We don't know where we are," we replied.

"Go to the door and look at the number," he told us.

We did so, and told him the number. He raced over to see us. Our reunion, in the hotel lobby, was a jumble of emotions. What joy, to see my mother's cousin. The last time I had seen him was at the Seven Blessings feast he and his beautiful Rebbetzin had hosted in Yasse after my wedding, in happier times. What sadness, to learn the fate of our dear ones. His wife had died of cancer after the war. So many memories came tumbling into my mind, seeing him, of the pleasant visits of my youth, when I travelled to Yasse and stayed with them. I had my wardrobe made there, and attended the theater and the opera. It was a very emotional scene when the Yasse Rav greeted my brother, my son and me.

The first Shabbos we were in America, we were invited to our cousin, Rabbi Perlow, the Novaminsker Rebbe. His mother and my father were sister and brother. It was Shabbat Ha Gadol, the Sabbath preceding the Passover holiday. When we sat down at the table, little David was reluctant to eat. He wanted to

know whether he was allowed to eat there. "Is the food was kosher?" he wanted to know. After I reassured him, we began to relax and enjoy ourselves. We felt welcomed into the bosom of our family, fine people, whom we had never met before.

In the afternoon, downstairs in his synagogue, my cousin, the Novaminsker Rebbe, gave his Shabbat Ha Gadol sermon. He spoke in Yiddish. David listened attentively, then went over to ask him a question.

"You spoke very beautifully," my son complimented the Rabbi. "But why didn't you say we should rebuild the Temple in our days?"

My cousins couldn't get over how advanced David seemed for his age, how clever a child had emerged from the inferno of Europe, to ask such a question his first Shabbos in America.

Meet Me in Saint Louis

After that Shabbos, we left for St. Louis by train. My cousin, Rebbetzin Rikela Eichenstein, who had sponsored our American voyage and arranged the tickets, met us at the station. Hugging her, I felt a softening in my soul. She represented the branch of our family tree which was not ripped away and destroyed. She flourished in an American garden. She cared, and she reached out to bring me to her. Because of her, I was able to leave the sadness of Europe and open a new chapter in my life.

She showed us treasured photographs of our family. Among the photos, a portrait of her father, the Trisker Rebbe of Lublin, and her mother, my father's sister, Tanta Malka. A photo of all the men in our family, taken at a wedding before the war. My father and his brothers, in shtreimels, sit in the front row next to my brother, Aaron, too young at age sixteen to have a beard. There is Uncle Mottele Twersky, from Hotin, and Uncle Arele Twersky from Asarnitz, whose Torah scroll we found hidden in the wall of his house in Mogilev. The

photographs transport us to another time, to a world which is no more. Of all the men in the photograph, only one, my brother Aaron, survived.

My first Passover in the United States was truly a celebration of freedom, just as it says in the Hagaddah. My cousin didn't invite too many people to her seder. She didn't want us to be overwhelmed, and she wanted to get to know us better. Her table was regal, elegantly set with the traditional silver and crystal. David, the youngest, recited the four questions, as we had taught him on the train. Everyone at the table was asked to say a few words about the meaning of Passover. When I spoke, I expressed my feelings about our personal liberation. Just as the Jews of Egypt were freed from Pharaoh so were we released from our persecution. I spoke about freedom and our wandering throughout Europe, just as the Jews wandered through the desert. I said that my wish was to become established in one place again. In the past year, I had slept in twenty places. I had wandered from one country to another.

The melodies for chanting the Haggadah were the same as those I heard in my childhood at my parent's table, and the meal tasted like those from Mama's kitchen. I felt I was once more in the embrace of family, after all our hardships.

We spoke and remembered, name by name, each of the people who had perished. Bringing us to America was an act of consolation for Rikele, after losing her parents, her sisters and brothers, cousins, nephews and nieces. We were the first to arrive, the remnant.

Many guests came during Passover week to visit and to meet the surviving cousins. Rikele introduced us to everyone in the community. We felt honored and welcome.

After the Passover festival was over, I began studying English. I used to go up to the roof, where it was quiet. I would take a book and read aloud, where my thousands of mistakes couldn't be overheard.

On Mother's Day, I was invited to be a guest speaker for a group of a few hundred women who were raising money for the old-age home. I spoke to them in Yiddish, telling them about my life. I chose as my theme: *Kibud Av V'Em*,

what it means to honor your father and your mother, after we lost all of our fathers and mothers in the camps. They wanted to know how old age homes were run in Europe, and I told them how impressed I was by the way it's being done in the United States. It was a very moving speech, which they enjoyed very much. My speech helped to raise additional funds.

My cousin took me out shopping for new clothes with money given by the community. I had nothing fashionable to wear, so Rikele advised me. We bought two outfits, my first American dresses - a silk dress for the spring, and a blue and white polka dot dress. Now I looked presentable, even fashionable. People found it hard to believe that I had just arrived from Europe.

One day, my cousins told me that they were expecting a visitor, a Rabbi coming to St. Louis from New York on his way to California. They invited me to have lunch with them. Of course, I accepted. I was always interested in meeting new people. I had no idea that he'd especially come to meet me, that my cousins were hoping to make a *shidduch*!

At my cousin's home, I saw a tall, handsome young man, dressed in a modern gray suit, with a matching neck tie. He was clean-shaven. My cousin brought us into his library. He wanted to show us his books. I noticed right away, as the books were being discussed, that the visitor was knowledgeable in many subjects. As a modern, educated woman, I was very pleased to enter the discussions.

David admired the Lone Ranger. He longed for an American cowboy outfit. That afternoon, after lunch, the visitor went to town and bought him a cowboy hat and a gun holster. He warmed the child's heart, and David adored him right away.

In the late afternoon, the Rabbi asked me whether I would like to go for a ride. It was a beautiful spring day, warm and sunny. We took a horse and buggy ride around Forrest Park. It was late in the afternoon, perhaps five o'clock. The days were already growing longer.

Suddenly, he started to sing a song which I remember my father loved to sing at our Shabbos table. I listened with tears in my eyes. When he came to the *Nach Amol* of the chorus, a feeling of nostalgia swept over me from days long ago. Once again, I was sitting with my family at our Shabbos table, listening to my father sing this very same song.

"Who is this man?" I wondered. He talks about Hasidism and modern philosophy. He sings the same melodies I knew as a child. We have a common background, and our ideas about life are very similar. I felt my heart begin to soften and open, nourished by the words of his song, which was also my father's song.

Mama had told me: "always remember who you are. Wherever you go, whatever you do, don't forget." Mama seemed to be with me, in the carriage, saying "Look, here is a man with whom there is a possibility for continuity. With him, you can continue your upbringing..."

We discussed a book by Franz Kafka, The Trial. We had a wonderful evening. When we returned to my cousin's home, I felt a new confidence being born. I knew that I could build my life with such a man. I knew that if this young man would ask me to marry him, I was ready and willing.

The next day, we went to town, and he bought for me a present, a copy of Kafka's The Trial. In the dedication of this book, he wrote to me

Weh spricht fergeh, aber alle lust will ewigkeit, tieffe, tieffe ewigkeit

which means: "if you have pain, you want it to end,
but if you have joy, you want it to last an eternity."

His poetic approach spoke to me, paving the way to a new beginning for both of us. When he asked me to marry him the next day, I accepted!

We did not marry right away, however. He left for Los Angeles, and I to visit relatives in Chicago and New York. That was a very difficult and lonely period for me. I rented an apartment in Borough Park. My cousin was there, the

Chernobyler Rebbetzin, who had known my father as a youth. She was very kind to me. We often spent the Sabbath at her home, and she watched David for me when I had to travel or go on errands. I became active with the Bessarabian Society. There were unanticipated reunions with relatives and old friends, with survivors and those who had come to America before the war. Many people went out of their way to help me. I was frequently invited to be the guest speaker at events in New York and Philadelphia to raise funds for the refugees.

My brother left for Miami to find a job as a Rabbi. He had received his ordination from Rabbi Tzirlsohn's yeshiva Kishinev, but our documents had been lost in the war, and he had no proof. So he returned to Yeshiva University to get a new degree.

David caught the measles, and was confined to a darkened room until the red, itchy rash subsided. When he recovered, I enrolled him in school, in a *cheder*. At first, because he only spoke German and not English, it was hard for him to make new friends. But the teachers were kind to him, and he quickly learned to read and write, and he made friends. He was soon speaking English without an accent. By the time we arrived in Los Angeles, he spoke perfect English.

English was harder for me to learn. During the summer, the schools were closed, and in the fall I was busy preparing for my wedding. I would soon be moving across country, so I couldn't register to study formally.

By December, we were ready to travel to Los Angeles and begin our new life with the Rabbi. There was a big party for us in New York, and another party in St. Louis. We were showered with gifts. We traveled on the Southern Pacific, a very long train. We had a cooler basket with kosher food, and made festive picnics on each of the three days of our voyage. How different this American train was from the European ones we knew such a short time ago. David watched out the window, wide-eyed as we passed through cowboy territory. He proudly wore his Lone Ranger outfit. We were going west.

At the train station in Los Angeles, my fiance was waiting with flowers. Our wedding was held in my cousin, Rabbi Twersky's home on a Saturday night.

There were ten guests. I wore a beautiful, winter-white suit I had brought from New York, with a matching hat. Afterwards, cake and tea were served. It was very simple, very quiet.

A few days later, we went to see the ocean. For the first time in my life, I saw palm trees, their fronds gracefully swaying beside the dazzling blue, Pacific Ocean. The trees stretched proudly into the sky. The soft, California air felt exquisitely light. It was as though the weight of Europe's dreary and dismal past were being lifted from me. I felt happy and grateful to be alive. Remembering the blessing recited on seeing the ocean, I praised the One who made "the Great Sea." For the first time in my life I also saw eucalyptus trees, which reminded me of the leaves of the walnut tree which I used to make medicine for my son in Mogilev.

During the week of Seven Blessings, our new friends honored us with small dinner parties. On Saturday night, The Zilbersteins, close friends of my husband's, made a lovely melave malka in our honor. Everyone there made a *d'var Torah*, and Rabbi Zilberstein spoke beautifully about all my grandparents, the Twersky dynasties, from the house of Chernobyl. However, he didn't mention my father. Stung by the oversight, I had thechutzpah to correct him. "Rabbi Zilberstein," I said to him, "you spoke beautifully about my ancestors, but you forgot to say that I also had a very holy father, who was a great rebbe, and who built up Hasidic life in Beltz."

Our first apartment was a one-bedroom in Boyle Heights, with a murphy bed in the living room for David. My husband didn't yet have a position. He didn't want to be a pulpit Rabbi like his father. He wanted to write and to publish. I said fine. He asked me to give him two years. I gave him the two years, but somehow, he never wrote his book. He was such a scholar. He read widely and studied all the time. He was always at his desk. But a book never came out. He took a job supervising the kosher butchers. The butchers paid us \$80 a month for the supervision. This income had to pay living expenses for the three of us, for David's schooling and for our rent and meals. Nobody knew how much we struggled.

When I was growing up, we had a cook. During the war, we had nothing to cook. And so, I came to Los Angeles not knowing how to cook. My husband's younger brother, Yiddel, taught me how to make chicken soup. Yiddel was a *schochet*, and he taught me which cuts of meat to buy and how to prepare them. Yiddel had come to America earlier than my husband, in the mid-thirties, with his wife, Sarah. Their children - a son and two daughters - were born in America. Their son was stricken with polio a week before he was to have become Bar Mitzvah. The polio paralysed him, and he tragically died at the age of twenty-seven. Their daughters, Pearl and Rachel, live in New York and California.

We registered David at a little yeshiva in Boyle Heights. It wasn't the same caliber as the yeshiva where he started in New York. They didn't start with prayers in the morning, and the boys didn't wear *tzitzith*, the fringed undershirt incumbent upon boys after the age of three. There was a wonderful principal, Rabbi Zilberstein, but the teachers weren't Sabbath observant. Nevertheless, it was a beginning.

I followed the example of my father and went to the principal to ask him to implement more observance at the school. At the very least, each day should start with the prayer of thanks said on waking, the *Modeh Ani*, the morning prayers. It was another fight to institute the wearing of *tsztzith*, a fringed undergarment we also call *arba kanfos*.

The *mikvah* (ritual bath) was one more cause for which I fought. The Los Angeles *mikvah* was at that time a disaster. An old woman sitting in a cockroach-infested basement was in charge. I organized a group of women to learn about the importance of going to the *mikvah*. At first, they laughed at me. "Who needs a mikvah?" they scoffed. "Why can't we just bathe in the ocean?"

I asked Rabbi Ponavitcher z"l, who was visiting, to help me out. He came one of our meetings, to explain about what a mikvah is. He was very emotional.

"Kinderlach, please," the old Rabbi pleaded with tears in his eyes. "I am too old, but you all have time. Please start working to build a *mikvah* in your neighborhood."

The women were moved by the Rabbi's tears and his pleading, and so a building committee was formed. We put together \$1,000 and bought a little lot in Boyle Heights. It took us a year to build the *mikvah*. Then we had to appoint people to oversee the workings of the *mikvah*, to be attendants, to keep the place clean, to wash the linens and towels.

My husband and I fought very hard to bring Yiddishkeit to Los Angeles. Every step of the way was a battle.

I became active with the Rumanian Society, which had been founded before the war by Rumanian immigrants new to Los Angeles. I was a speaker to help them raise funds for their organization. I also spoke on behalf of the old age home. The actress, Mary Pickford, supported the old age home. She invited 500 women to her estate. I dressed very elegantly for that event, in a black dress with a veiled hat. I looked more like a Vogue Magazine model than a refugee from the war.

I joined Mizrachi, the religious Zionist organization, and was invited to give the invocation at a Mother's Day luncheon at the Biltmore Hotel. I accepted nervously. Even though I had already spoken many times, I wished I had better command of the English language. I had only been in Los Angeles half a year, and my English still wasn't very good. I had grown up speaking Rumanian, Yiddish, German, Russian and French, but English was coming harder, perhaps because I was older. For the invocation, I would read the opening prayer from a page. There were a lot of women there from Rumania, and others who spoke Yiddish.

The invitation to the luncheon came in the mail, in a pale, yellow envelope. Inside, I saw my name listed in the program in black, italic script on lemon stationary. The Rebbetzin Chana Twersky Rottenberg will give the invocation on behalf of the refugees.

My husband knew I was worried about the invocation, even though I would be reading it from a paper. But I fretted nonetheless. How could I presume to read in my halting English to a sophisticated, American audience?

"Don't worry, Chanale," Ephraim reassured me. "You will speak from your heart, and the words will be in front of your eyes. You will be wonderful. The women will love you, and they will be moved by your prayer to give money to help the refugees. It will be your *z'chus*, your merit to do this mitzvah, and I am sure you will enjoy yourself in the process. I will pick David up from *cheder* and we will enjoy each other's company until you return. "

I looked at my new husband with amazement. How did he know the right thing to say to me? I already felt myself calming down, as I began to translate my prayer into English, with his help.

What to wear was not a problem. Rickela had taken me shopping in St. Louis, and I had the blue and white polka dot dress with a stylish, full skirt. Now that more fabric was available, the post-war fashions felt luxuriously feminine.

My friend, Celia Zylbercweig, the Yiddish actress, called to take me to the luncheon. She came for me in a taxi, looking elegant in her theatrical clothes. Her pillbox hat boasted a mysterious veil, and her gloved hands clasped mine warmly.

"I am a little worried about my invocation," I admitted to her as the taxi traveled down Wilshire Boulevard.

"Nonsense," Celia laughed. "You have your script, and you have practiced. Relax."

Celia was an actress on the Yiddish stage. She was certainly more relaxed about public appearances than I would ever be.

The Biltmore Hotel, painted pale sunshine yellow, was surrounded by tall, elegant palm trees.

"Isn't it wonderful," I whispered to Celia as we strode past the potted plants in the lobby, "to feel as if one is in the countryside in downtown Los Angeles?"

"We are in the City of the Angels, after all," she responded with a lipsticked smile. "Here, I have oranges growing on a tree in my back yard even in the middle of the winter!"

The theme of the luncheon was "sharing abundance," and a cornucopia of tropical fruits graced the head table, filled with tangerines and pineapples. The bright colors and rounded shapes of the fruits were pleasing to the eye, whetting our appetites for the fresh fruit salad and cottage cheese lunch we were about to be served. The food, so delightfully American, made me light-headed with new-found joy. As I looked about the banquet hall filled with beautifully dressed women, I felt privileged to be joining them in our new life.

Celia introduced me to some of her friends, who were all newcomers to Los Angeles. Some, like me, were recently arrived from Europe; others had been living on the East Coast during the war. I heard as much Yiddish as English being spoken. We were served a spiked fruit punch before the luncheon by waiters in pressed suits. "L'chaim!" the ladies wished each other, as they clinked their glasses together.

It was a salutation we never heard in Mogilev, where I had gotten in trouble for ladling too much soup in the factory kitchen. That all seemed so far away, now. I thought of all the people who never saw a tangerine throughout the endless war. People who had starved to death in front of my eyes, when I was powerless to help them.

I noticed a young woman at one of the tables, her cheeks flushed. Perhaps she is pregnant, I mused. Something about the tilt of her head reminded me of my sister, Rivka. She would look like this lovely young lady, I thought, if she had only survived.

I was feeling more relaxed as I made my way to the dais, invocation clutched in hand. I had practiced my short prayer, reading it over and over in our living room, as I had once practiced to the birds on my cousin's roof in St. Louis. The ladies, in their high heeled shoes and luncheon hats, hushed and listened, smiling encouragingly. I asked the All-mighty to bless them for their good deeds

in helping the survivors to build a new life in America. After the speeches were over, they opened their purses and withdrew their checkbooks.

I thought about Mama, how she had taught me to always run after mitzvahs. "You were put into the world to do good deeds," she always said. "You will find your reward in the World to Come.

Are you watching me, Mama, from your perch in heaven, as I sit in this California hotel, raising money to help the refugees?

Looking up, past the art deco chandelier, I gaze out the arched window, where I see soft clouds dotting the sky above the palm trees.

Mama, who made so many baskets of food for the poor, was not here to taste the ambrosia of this luncheon, where the food sings "welcome to California." I tasted it for her, lifting my goblet again, l'Chaim.

I never met my husband's father, Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Rottenberg, who passed away before I came to California. He was from Kleimberdine, the town on the Czech border I had passed through on my way to Prague. The climate in New York was too harsh for his health, and his doctors suggested the milder climate of Los Angeles. He was the first Hasidic Rabbi to arrive in Los Angeles. My mother-in-law, Devorah Zissel, kept her door open to everyone who came seeking help. After her husband passed away in 1945, the synagogue was closed, and she moved to New York to live with her oldest son, Rabbi Pinchas Shalom Rottenberg. After my husband and I were married, his parent's former congregants came to visit us. Many refugees came to live in Boyle Heights after the war, where there were kosher butchers and yeshivas for the children. We had an open-door policy, and slowly, all the people who had come to America and left their Yiddishkeit behind, came back to it through our little apartment.

My mother-in-law was living in New York. After our wedding, I said to my husband: "I am longing for a mother. I would very much like for your mother to come and spend the summer with us."

She did come, spending the first of many summers with us in our tiny apartment. We managed fine. A tiny woman who always dressed in black, she davened every morning with fervour. The great tragedy which befell our people left its mark on her. She lost twenty children and grandchildren in the war. Of her eight children, only three survived. The rest perished in concentration camps. You can imagine what she must have felt in her heart, but she never spoke of it. It was too painful.

My husband always bought little gifts for me for every holiday, and we spoke about what to give to his mother. He bought her a little broach. She was very tactful about how she received this token. "It is very beautiful," she said, "but I cannot wear it. Ever since what happened in Europe, I no longer wear jewelry."

My mother-in-law spent every summer with us for ten years, until she died. The rest of the year, she lived with her son in the Bronx. It was a large, Hasidic family, with many children to brighten her final years.

Many Rabbis, who came to Los Angeles to raise funds for their yeshivas, also found their way to our apartment. They thought that Los Angeles was full of movie stars and rich people. The Bobover Rebbe's brother stayed with us, sleeping in the Murphy bed in the living room of our one-bedroom apartment.

We used to invite people to our home on Saturday nights for *melave malkas*, and I would tell my story. All kinds of people came to us, from every walk of life, young and old, rich and poor, *frum* and very far from religious observance.

Many of those who settled in Boyle Heights were Jews who came from the concentration camps of Europe. As they prospered and became more prominent in the community, they left Boyle Heights and moved to the west side of Los Angeles. We had a little money saved up, and after two years in Boyle Heights, we began to look for a house to buy on the west side. We found one house at an auction, a beautiful two-storey house with a huge living room. I thought perhaps we could make a synagogue in the living room, but it never happened. People didn't want to pray in someone's living room; they wanted a separate building.

We approached the Hungarian Jews living in our neighborhood to form a synagogue. They were so far away from Yiddishkeit and Orthodoxy, having put religion aside and focusing all their energy into the material side of their lives. Nevertheless, we rented a hall for the High Holidays, hired a cantor and invited them to pray with us. We asked them to serve as officers of this new synagogue. They were doctors, professional people. They came for the High Holidays, but then they dropped out again. I had baked dozens of cakes for breaking the fast after Yom Kippur, hoping to keep them in shule with the sweet taste of the New Year. After a few months, we had to abandon the project entirely. We lost a lot of money.

Many of the Hungarian survivors preferred going to one of the big Reform or Conservative synagogues. They didn't like it that men and women sat separately, behind the *mechitzah*, in our shule. They were in a hurry to shed every tradition that connected them to the past. They wanted to be more American than Yankee Doodle Dandy. They wanted to forget, to Americanize and to close the page of the war years. So it was hard to persuade people to help us with the synagogue. After a few years, some came back to us. We kept our shule spotless, and we made the mechitza a beautiful, transparent glass. Everything was done in taste. They started coming back to religion and to Orthodoxy, but our struggle to build a synagogue was still an uphill fight.

I felt discouraged. I was fighting two battles, one with my own soul, the other with the material side of our life. We weren't making a living. We had no money and no spiritual community, either. I longed for a synagogue to be the center of our life. That is what I had known in Rumania, and it depressed me to see that people were rebuilding their lives without thinking of the spiritual treasures which lay unclaimed by them - the holy Sabbath, the beautiful songs and melodies, the philosophy, the stories, the Torah teachings. Whenever we tried to make a new synagogue, the congregants would treat my husband as their employee, never giving him the honor due to a Rebbe. We found that we couldn't live with such conditions, but neither could we live without a shule.

It was a spiritual struggle for me, fighting with my soul. I wanted so much to have a Hasidic synagogue, to recreate the atmosphere in which I was raised.

Whenever I met someone, I would invite them over for a Sabbath meal. "She will fit in, he will fit in," but we were from another world, and none of them seemed to understand us. I continued to extend invitations. How could we sit down to an empty table on Friday night? How could we not have people around our table? So every Friday night, we invited guests to our table. Many of them couldn't relate. They fidgeted through the melodies and the stories. They got bored. I knew that if Ephraim got up on the holidays to give a sermon, and he saw men and women sitting together, he would not be able to speak. "This is my life?" he would say. "For this I live? I have to change everything I believe in because of money?"

There was a growing Jewish community in the neighborhood around Third and La Brea. Some of the leaders approached us to help them build an Orthodox synagogue in their neighborhood. It meant selling our house and moving again, but we did so gladly. It was my dream to have a shule. A very strong desire. I thought that it was perhaps for this reason that I had survived. To be an influence on the next generation, to show them the beauty of what we had lost in Europe. To inspire them to rebuild a strong, religious community here in America. My husband did not share my aspirations. He was opposed to the idea of being an American-style pulpit Rabbi, whose conditions were dictated by the laity. He would have wanted a congregation based on the principles of Hassidism, where the Rav was the leader, teaching the congregants to live by the principles of Torah.

He continued working supervising the kosher butchers. It brought in very little money. I knew I had to go to work. But what did I know about making a living? I had worked in Europe to survive, but now I wanted more meaning from my work, and the Rabbinate was all I knew. I knew Hebrew, but I didn't have a degree enabling me to get a job. I took a course in real estate, but my husband discouraged me from going into that profession. "What are you going to do?" he asked me. "Drive people around to show them properties? It's not for you." When I didn't pass the licensing test, I dropped the idea altogether.

I decided to go back to school, intending to earn a degree that would be accepted by the Bureau of Jewish Education, so I could teach. I studied for four

years at the University of Judaism, until I got my college degree in Hebrew Education, specializing in Hebrew literature. I wrote my thesis on the works of S. Y. Agnon. I attended classes in the morning and taught in the Talmud Torah in the afternoon.

After we moved out of Boyle Heights, we found a storefront to rent, and started another synagogue. Some of the Hungarian Jews returned to us. They had big, extended families, and were beginning to become successful in business and in their professions. We had some friends among them who helped us buy a lot. Then we had to qualify for a loan. We had no collateral. We had only the money which a man gave us to help us buy the lot.

We made a few fund-raising dinners to build the synagogue. Still, my husband didn't want to be an employee of his congregants. They wanted to be *balabatim*, to run the shule their way, to have all the control, to hire and fire, to have conditions. They didn't want to pay him a salary.

We had mortgages to pay. We established a little *cheder*, and an afternoon school, where I used to teach. The girls came on Mondays and Wednesdays, the boys on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The little ones came on Sunday mornings. I took in children without pay, to teach them about Yiddishkeit, to prepare them to enter yeshiva and to study for their bar mitzvahs. The school continued for ten years, and I found the work most rewarding.

Israel

In the early years, when we had to struggle so hard just to make ends meet, a trip to Israel was an unthinkable dream. Later, after the synagogue began to thrive, the congregation honored us at a big dinner, and they presented us with tickets to travel to Israel.

We had been receiving letters from our relatives in Israel for years saying "everyone comes to Israel, why don't you?"

Finally, it was our turn. We stopped in New York for a week, where we had many moving reunions with relatives and school friends from before the war.

The Shabbos we were in New York, we were invited to the home of my cousin, Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel for the third meal. We are related through his uncle, the Novominsker Rebbe of Warsaw, who was my uncle, too. We had such a wonderful time there with Sylvia, his wife, and with Susie, their daughter, who was going out that week-end on her first date. I went to one of Sylvia's piano concerts, and we attended a lecture given by Elie Wiesel.

Ephraim wanted to go to Israel by boat. He thought that the sea voyage would be relaxing and enjoyable for both of us. He was right, except for one thing. He forgot how much I suffer from sea-sickness.

We boarded the "Zion," an Israeli vessel run by the Zim line, on Friday afternoon, and found in our room a beautiful bouquet of flowers and a bottle of kosher wine from the Heschels. The captain of the ship arranged for us to be seated at his table, where the most delicious kosher food was served. Sadly, I was sea-sick throughout the entire trip. When we arrived in Lisbon, I was so sick that they had to put me into a hospital.

We finally arrived in the port of Haifa in May, where Coka met us with tears of joy and of sorrow. We had not seen each other since I left Europe after the war. What a reunion we had!

That first day in Haifa, walking into the stores with the Hebrew signs in front, and seeing how plentiful life had become in Israel, I felt that I belonged here. When I saw the shopkeepers, I thanked G-d that they had businesses and a livelihood.

We spent the holiday of Shavuot in Yerushalayim. We stayed at the Kings Hotel. Someone had put a notice in the newspaper that we had arrived, and so we had visitors day and night. We spent the first day of Shavuoth with my mother's brother, Rabbi Chanoch Ashkenazi, the Alesker Rebbe, who survived the war in Bucharest and later came to Israel with his wife and children. His home was in an apartment close to the Jordanian border. On Yontif they had a rich, Hasidic tisch.

My aunt, Tanta Rachel, my mother's sister, invited us for the second day. She was such a *tzadeket* that she didn't use electricity on the holiday at all, only

candles. "On Shabbat, they work at the main center for the electric company," she explained.

It was the pilgrimage holiday, and from the hotel, we could see the Holy Wall, but we weren't able to go there to pray. It was so sad. We could see all the Arabs standing there. We could see them praying at the Mosque. But we Jews, who had shed so much blood for this holy place, could only stand on top of a building and look down on the other side. We looked down on them and prayed for G-d to strengthen and elevate us to return to that place.

On Shabbat, we davened at the Yeshurun Synagogue, a large, modern synagogue in the center of town, where we met President Zalman Shazar, and where my husband had the honor of reading maftir. The president of the congregation invited us to his house for kiddush. President Shazar invited my husband to come to a class at his home on Shabbat in the afternoon.

At the synagogue, I found cousins, Twerskys, whom I knew from Kishinev, from before the war. Every encounter was the same, the joy of reunion tempered by tears for those who are no more. Who is alive, who survived, who did not.

One night, a visitor told my husband about a friend of his who had survived, who had been his school mate when they were children. It was late at night, but we immediately ran to the man's address, and they had a very emotional reunion.

Of course we visited every relative who survived, aunts, uncles, cousins, and my former sisters-in-law, Coka and Rosa, and we met their families. We also made new friends.

We met the Agnons at the home of Penina and Pinchas Peli, in Rehavia, and they invited us to come and visit them in Talpiot. It was a Friday afternoon, and as we drove up to their home, we saw all the bullet holes in the walls. Inside the house, Mrs. Agnon sat on the sofa, reading. S.Y. Agnon pointed to his wife and told my husband, "You see my wife? She is a great teacher, a great translator, and a great *tzadeket*." In those days, she was translating Mishnayot.

"See all these holes in the walls?" he asked, pointing to the bullet holes. "All these came from the Jordanians, who were shelling us during the war. We were hiding in the cellar, and the bullets broke everything in the house, but we were safe. They didn't get inside our house. Only the bullets came in."

We sat for a few hours talking, then rushed back to the hotel to get ready for Shabbat. Saturday night, Agnon called us and said he wanted to see us again. We all met at the Peli's home in Rehavia. There was a full moon that night, and we sat on the balcony in the moonlight talking about literature. My husband and Agnon were sipping brandy, singing, telling stories. I was writing my thesis on Agnon's story, "*Sippur Pashut*," "*A Simple Story*." We spoke about his stories.

"Why don't you write?" he asked my husband. 'You know so many, many stories. Do you have any idea how long it takes me to write even a little story? And you have such beautiful stories to tell." In this way, Agnon encouraged Ephraim to write.

"I want to write about you," I broke into the conversation.

"Be my guest!" Agnon replied grandly. This was long before he received his Nobel Prize for literature.

We called for a taxi at one in the morning to take the Agnons home. There, Agnon asked the taxi driver to wait while he went into his garden. Moments later, he returned with a bunch of night-blooming jasmine flowers. Presenting them with a flourish, he said: "For the *Shayna Rebbetzin*."

I was so moved that tears came to my eyes. I took the flowers home and preserved them. I keep them still in the silver spice box which once belonged to the Baal Shem Tov.

We spent a month in Israel. Our tickets took us next to Europe. I had mixed feelings about going there. I was sure, after being in the Holy Land, that Europe would seem too secular, and we would not enjoy being there. My aunt, Tanta Rachel, urged me to go. "Take advantage of everything which comes your way," she insisted.

And so, she convinced us, and we went to Europe because of her. We spent a month touring Italy, France and England, visiting all the historic sites and the museums. Our friends, the Kleins, showed us around. I had such a feeling of awe, to be walking in the places I only knew from school books.

There was tremendous poverty in Italy. Children begging in the streets. My husband cashed some bills into coins so he would have what to give these poor children.

My husband had such vast scope of knowledge. He knew more about Italy than the tour guide, who eventually stopped explaining the sights to us and instead asked Ephraim to take over. We flew home by plane, no more sea voyages for me!

When we returned, I spoke about our trip to many organizations. My favorite was Mizrahi. The Hatikva chapter invited me to be the guest speaker at their big, fund-raising dinner, and I was very happy to share my impressions of my first visit in the Holy Land.

Galilee House

I used to visit old people I knew of who were lonely or sick, needing attention and care. I brought food to them, sat and spoke with them. Some of these people were frail and neglected. It was impossible for them to care for themselves, but their children were too busy or lived far away. Each of those beautiful old people reminded me of the parents I lost in the war. I was happy to bring some cheer into their lives.

The mitzvah of *Bikur Cholim*, visitation of the sick, was of supreme importance to me always. My husband had a friend, an elderly Hungarian woman who had been placed in a private convalescent home. I went there to visit her and came out broken hearted. This woman was from the Hungarian aristocracy. Highly educated and well-read, she came from a very fine family the Rabbi had known in Europe.

When I left her, I began to think about what I could do to help her, and people like her. There was no such thing as a kosher convalescent or retirement home. I began to think about going into that field, to open a small business to help elderly religious people.

In the meantime, I continued to help the elderly people I met. I brought them meals for Shabbat, clothing, and a kind, cheerful word. I did all kinds of mitzvot for them, because I saw that these elderly people, who had no families, or whose children visited only once a week, really needed my help. I spent several days a week devoting my time to my elderly friends.

I found an old age home for sale, a retirement home in the San Fernando Valley, about a half-hour's drive from my home. I wanted to buy it. It seemed very clear to me that this work, caring for our aged, was holy work. Mitzvah work. I came to it naturally. Mama had been training me to do this work throughout my childhood.

My husband had reservations about this business venture. He was afraid to have me drive every day, and to be working so hard. But I didn't let him discourage me. I looked further into the matter, and found that the price was reasonable. Still, I didn't have the money. One woman I used to care for said to me: "I will give you \$5,000 for the downpayment. I negotiated with the sellers, and the \$5,000 the lady lent me went for the downpayment. I went to the bank for a loan to cover the rest. I was really having doubts. What did I know about taking out a loan and starting a business? Still, I had faith that G-d will help me, that He will direct me. And so, in this way, I started my business. I was quite successful. I built up a beautiful, kosher home. It was rewarding.

I took in the lady who loaned me the \$5,000, and I kept her in my home for many years. She lived up those \$5,000, and still I kept her.

I named it The Galilee House, after the Galilee, where I had visited when we were in Israel. It was located on Magnolia Boulevard in the Valley, close to Burbank. It took me half an hour to drive there. I had that business for twenty years. I had great satisfaction helping the people who came to live in my home.

The residents were poor and not so poor, alert and in decline. Jews and non-Jews. Old and young. The daughter of a friend of mine tried to commit suicide. After her life was saved, she also came to live in my home.

It wasn't fashionable in those days to send elderly people into a home. There were five people residing there when I took it over, but there were 52 guests when it was full, and a staff of fifteen. I worked hard, many hours each day, but never did I neglect my own family on Shabbat or Yom Tov at home. There were ups and downs in the business. I was sometimes sick. I had an eye operation. I fell, and injured my back. I lost half a finger touching a live electric wire in my office. Now my hand matched my husband's. He also was missing half a finger, due to an infection. My father also had the tip of a finger amputated. It was my faith which kept me going.

When it came to Passover, the non-Jews ate matzos, saying: "Oh I do love these crackers." They liked the Jewish food, the blintzes and the matzo ball soup.

I really learned to run my business from my mother, who taught me how to do mitzvot. Not everyone in business thinks about the reward they will get in the World to Come. They only think about this world. But I never lost my sense of honesty and kindness. I had a staff of fifteen people, black and white, Chinese, Mexican and Japanese.

It was not always easy. For instance, I always had a lot of trouble staffing the night shift, finding people to work from 11:00 at night until 8:00 in the morning. One day, I advertised for a nightshift position. A young woman came for the interview. She had a small child in her arms. She seemed very nice, so I hired her to come and work on the night shift. Later, I discovered that she had been stealing things from the residents, and I had to fire her.

She took me to the Labor Department and we ended up in court. The judge asked me why I had hired her. She was under eighteen years old.

"Your honor," I replied. "This beautiful young woman came in to make her application carrying a child. I didn't calculate her age. I saw that she is already a mother. On the application, she put her name and her social security number. It

never occurred to me that she might still be a young girl. She looked mature to me."

"You did not have the right to hire her," the Judge replied. "She was not old enough for the job."

"Believe me, Your Honor, I am very sorry this happened," I told the judge. "I will be more careful in the future to check the age of the people who apply to work in my home."

The judge gave me two years probation. I was very careful after that, keeping a calculator in my desk to figure out the ages of my applicants.

It was my custom to make home visits to interview the old people applying for admission to Galilee House. Some of these visits were heart breaking. To see an old woman on the threshold of the last chapter of her life, packing a house full of memories into give-away boxes, moving into smaller quarters with strangers.

I remember one woman was still living in her own home. She had Alzheimers, and had become forgetful, which in those days was called senile. She was sitting in her living room on a sofa near the piano, embroidering. My heart went out to her. How could I take this lovely woman out of her beautiful home and move her into one little room, I wondered. Her family was anxious to have her admitted, and so I brought her in. She had a difficult adjustment to her new surroundings. She was disoriented and forlorn.

One day, she wandered away from the home and got lost. We searched everywhere and couldn't find her. I was horribly upset. Three days later, the police found her wandering barefoot in a different city. They brought her back, and after that she was okay about remaining in the Home.

One lady wanted to bring her wedding portrait with her when she moved into the home. Why not? It would make her feel better to have mementoes of her life with her. Her name was Sonia. As she aged, she became anemic and frail. She was a very lovely lady. She needed medication, which at first her daughter used

to bring to her. Then the daughter thought "what does my mother need with all this medication?" and she stopped buying it. So I went and bought the medicines with money from my own pocket. The woman was so thin, you could see every vein in her hands. I used to send the bills to her daughter, but there came a time when the daughter said she refused to pay for it. I said: it doesn't matter, I will still provide it for her. I continued to give her the medications up until the time when I sold the facility. But when I sold the place, there was nobody to provide her medications, and she died shortly afterwards.

I had a back injury which put me in a lot of pain. I couldn't sit, I couldn't stand. I needed an operation, and could no longer go to work. So I leased the place for two years to a shady character who never paid the rent and when I recovered and took the place back, it was in ruins. Half the guests had left, and the home was filthy.

Just as I was taking the place back, I accepted a new resident, a woman whose family brought her to live there. I told the family that I had just taken the place over and had many improvements to make. I told them I was going to make a beautiful garden in the courtyard. They were very happy to hear it. A few days later, I received in the mail a check from the son of this woman. He wrote that he was impressed by our home and sent me a check to landscape the garden and plant flowers for the mothers to enjoy and to pick.

His mother lived there for a few years. Every year, he used to send me flowers at Rosh Hashana. Roses, in recognition of the care his mother received. He kept in contact even after his mother passed away. I put all my heart and devotion into that business, I was in it for more than the money.

When I first opened the home, I was obliged to take younger people in as well, people who had been released from asylums. Once I admitted a 45 year-old woman whose family had placed her in a psychiatric facility many years before. She had been institutionalized for twenty years before she came to me. She smoked heavily. My job was to get her readjusted to civilization, and she did make the adjustment, beautifully.

Another resident, a senile woman, went looking every morning for her piano. We had a piano, but she could tell that it wasn't hers. She always asked: "where is my piano?" Sometimes she played the piano. She was with us a few years before she passed away. Her daughter came diligently a few times a week to visit her mother.

One year, as I was cleaning before Passover, I checked the safe in my office for crumbs of chametz, and found an envelope marked "Mrs. Sullivan" inside. The envelope contained a diamond ring belonging to this woman. I had feared she would lose the ring, or that it would be stolen, so I had put it in the safe, and I completely forgot about it. I was very upset. I thought, oh my G-d, the woman passed away and her daughter will think that I kept her diamond. I called the daughter and asked her to come to my office.

She sat down. I said: "I have something to tell you."

She said: "What is it." She probably thought I was going to ask her to pay a bill.

"When your mother moved into this home," I explained, "I took away her diamond ring and put it in the safe. Just recently, I came across it. I called you in to return it to you, with my deepest apologies for the oversight.

The daughter looked at me with tears in her eyes, and said: "Mrs. Rottenberg, believe me, you are the only person in the world who would do this. I didn't know about my mother's diamond. I have only the deepest respect for your honesty."

Later, she wrote me a letter thanking me. Every Christmas, I used to get a card from her, with words of admiration.

A local television studio was doing a series about retirement homes. They sent a crew to film a feature story about my home. They paid each resident \$50 to appear in the segment, and I received \$1,000 for giving permission. They arrived early in the morning with trucks, cameras, and a large film crew. Throughout the day, they interviewed the residents and the staff and photographed the building, inside and out. The television program brought

attention to my business, and it flourished. I made money and we were able to live comfortably.

We celebrated every holiday at the Galilee House. The kitchen was koshered for Passover, and we made a seder for the residents. One time, there was an old man from a kosher family living in a Catholic sanatorium across the street from us. Every day, I sent him a kosher lunch. I often brought him across the street to sit with fellow Jews.

During all the years I was in business, I never sacrificed a Shabbat. Every Shabbat and every holiday, I was at home with my husband and with my son. I always had guests. My home was open to everybody.

How did I manage to juggle full-time work with being a gracious Rebbetzin and hostess? Thank G-d, through all the years, I was blessed with the help of two devoted women. Mrs. Tina Narcia lived with us and kept the house sparkling clean. Mrs. Smith, a Hungarian-American woman, was our cook for thirty years.

Once, I wanted to invite a large group of people for dinner. I called Mrs. Smith to make arrangements with her.

"I'm sorry, I cannot come," she apologized.

"What is wrong? Are you ill?" I asked, alarmed. Mrs. Smith was eighty-two years old at the time.

"Oh, no," she replied. "I've gotten married, and my husband doesn't want me to work any more!"

I was sorry to lose my cook, but I wished her a hearty "Mazel Tov," and found another way to make dinner. Thank G-d, my business continued to prosper. I could afford to give more tzedakah. I could accept residents whose only income was social security.

These are the things which I did in my life, to sanctify the name of G-d. In Hebrew, we call it to *M'kadesh Hashem*.

Yiddish Los Angeles

In the early years, despite the struggle we had to make a living, we were blessed by a growing circle of friends, who enriched our community with the wide scope of their talent.

Our closest friends, Zalman and Celia Zylbercweig, came to Los Angeles in 1948. Celia was born in the town of Chelm, the legendary place where Shalom Aleichem based his classic tales. She left her European stage career for Argentina, where she joined a Jewish theater company and toured through South America, Mexico and the United States. While working as an actress on the Yiddish stage in Mexico, she met Zalman, who wrote, translated and directed plays. They married and moved to New York. Zalman worked for fifty years on his Lexicon for Yiddish Theatre, a six-volume encyclopedia he began in Galicia in the early thirties, and continued working on throughout his life. He edited a Yiddish Theatre Magazine, and hosted a Jewish radio program.

My husband entered the public spotlight on Zalman Zylbercweig's radio show, the "Yiddishe Shtunde on the radio," which aired daily. His spot ran from nine until ten every Friday morning, in Yiddish. The Rabbi commented on the Torah portion and taught about the holidays.

Another guest on the show was Morry Schwartz, the prominent Yiddish actor, who appeared in Los Angeles from time to time. Morry's repertoire spanned 150 plays, from the Yiddish theatrical classics, like Shalom Asche's "The Dybbuk," and the plays of Shalom Aleichem to Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Shaw, all translated into Yiddish.

The Zylbercweigs were our closest friends. They didn't pray in our synagogue, preferring to belong to a shule where they could sit together, but they came to every one of our Passover Seders for over thirty years, and were frequent Shabbat guests as well. Through Zalman and Celia, we came into contact with the theatrical world. Whenever Morry Schwartz was in town, they would bring

him to our house for lunch on Shabbat. The first time he came, he gave us tickets to see him in the "Dybbuk."

Celia was my theater-going partner. Neither of us drove, so we took the bus, all dressed up in our finest clothes. Morry's flamboyant performance in "The Dybbuk" moved us to tears.

After the play, we went to tell him how impressed we were with the performance. "You could be my prima donnas," he told us, when he saw how we were dressed. But of course we weren't. Celia had retired from the stage, and I remained who I was.

Our friendship with Morry Schwartz and his family continued for many years. He visited us whenever he came to Los Angeles, and I enjoyed every one of the plays in which I saw him. Morry had such a warm neshoma, a quality of soul-fullness. He was very sensitive. He loved discussing Hassidism with Ephraim, and he educated us about the Jewish theatre and about the translated plays which he knew so well.

Morry always wanted to break into Hollywood. He tried to perform in English, but was unsuccessful. He was really a true Jewish actor.

Celia was my traveling companion and my link to the cultural world. We went to concerts and plays. We went to Brazil and Palm Springs together. One night, we were standing at the bus stop waiting for a ride home, when a car stopped and a man's voice said he'd give us a lift. It was Zalman. We laughed all the way home. The other people at the bus stop must have wondered what sort of women we were, accepting a ride like that!

Once, Celia was appearing in a Yiddish play at the Wilshire Ebell Theater, and she needed a *yeshiva bocher* for the performance. My son, David, who was eight years old at the time, was only too happy to appear on stage. Prancing on stage that Saturday night, he sang out in Yiddish: "I don't want to be a rebbe, I don't want to go to cheder."

Celia and Zalman introduced us to many prominent Yiddish cultural figures. There was the singer, Faigele Panitz. Faigele and Yakov Panitz built the Jewish Cultural Center on Fairfax Avenue near Beverly. There was Mrs. Feuchtwanger, whose husband, the writer, left a library with thousands of books to a university.

We had a Chanukah party every year, an open-house. We lit the candles, ate potato latkes, sang songs, played dreidel. And who came to our party? Celia and Zalman of course, and many other people whom we knew through them.

Nikki

Nikki wandered into the kitchen at the Galilee House, and followed the cook when she came into my office to tell me about him. He was a small, shaggy brown shih-tzu dog, the kind used in Tibetan monasteries for prayer wheels. He immediately began to jump on me. I had never had a dog, and didn't particularly like them. In fact, they frightened me. I had no desire to adopt a dog, so I gave him to one of the nurses. After a few days, she brought him back. She already had her own dogs and couldn't keep him as well. So, reluctantly, I kept him.

He stayed with me at the old age home during the day, and came home with me at night. At first, Ephraim didn't like him. He was afraid of him. But he soon realised that the dog, who had an uncanny ability to recognize who was on the other side of a closed door, could be a valuable addition to our household.

One Shabbat, the dog wandered away and got lost. On one hand, I was relieved to be rid of the responsibility for him. But since I'd already become attached to him, I thought I'd better try to find him. I was worried. He must be hungry. I gave five dollars to a group of children to go out looking for Nikki, and they brought him back.

Little by little, Ephraim got used to the small brown dog. He started to like him. Nikki gave us a lot of love. As he grew older, he calmed down. He announced every visitor to our door.

He never interrupted when Ephraim was learning out loud, but when the study session was over, he would run into the office and scratch Ephraim's legs until he'd take him out for a walk. Soon the whole neighborhood was talking about the rabbi with the dog.

A funny thing about Nikki was that he never ate treif. Once, Erev Pesach, I got a telephone call. A woman had a question: "How do you feed your dog on Passover, since dog food isn't kosher?"

"I don't have a problem with that," I answered. "My dog eats matzo and gefillte fish. He eats whatever we eat."

We had to hire dog sitters when we traveled, because Nikki refused to eat non-kosher food. Once, we put him into a kennel for ten days. He went on a hunger strike and nearly died.

After that, before we traveled I would make up little packages of food for him to eat while we were gone.

He was with us for fifteen years. When he got old and became incontinent, he would go and hide. It was as though he was ashamed he'd done something wrong.

I took him to the vet for the last shot. He gave me a kiss, as though he were saying thank you and good bye. I wrapped him in a blanket, and we buried him in our garden. We made a little sign: "in loving memory of Nikki." On his grave, we planted a rose bush, from which we never cut the flowers. It blooms all year round.

Birds of Paradise

Our house on Alta Vista had a garden in the back yard, where, over the years, we planted many flowers and trees. One year, we planted a bird of paradise, and waited eagerly for it to bloom.

One day, Ephraim came in from the garden laughing with delight.

"What is it?" I asked him.

"Come Channele," he replied, using the biblical phrase from the Song of Songs, "*Bo'i l'ganee*. Come into my garden."

I had been in the kitchen cooking. The savory aroma of fresh-chopped onions and garlic still clung to me as I made my way into the bright, afternoon sunlight. Even before my eyes adjusted to the light, I heard Ephraim exclaim: "Mazel Tov. Our bird of paradise has given birth."

Indeed, it was so. There, standing proudly on its stalk, was a baby bird of paradise, its orange beak pointing in the secret directions of mystery and delight.

That spring, the bird of paradise was joined by another bird, who flew into the window of Ephraim's study, startling him as he sat at his desk, writing. It was a small, white parakeet.

David was so happy to welcome this bird. He named him Charlie, and immediately ran to the pet store to buy him a bird cage. When David left home to study in yeshiva, Ephraim assumed responsibility for its care. Every Friday before Shabbat, he would clean the cage, putting in clean newspaper and changing the sand.

The door to Charlie's bird cage was never closed. The bird lived in Ephraim's study with perfect manners. When Ephraim sat learning, the bird perched attentively on his shoulder, as though he, too, participated in the study session. On the Sabbath, Charlie again appeared on Ephraim's shoulder for kiddush, and after sipping a drop of wine, he returned to his cage. Ephraim was convinced that Charlie was a *gilgul*, a reincarnation of some great soul who needed to learn certain texts. He always treated Charlie as an honored, mysterious guest.

One day, the bird disappeared. We searched all over the neighborhood, but returned home empty-handed.

It was as though a light were extinguished in the house, which now lacked Charlie's song, his enigmatic personality. Ephraim remarked that in the absence of his study partner, his own enthusiasm for learning was diminished.

One evening, we heard the sound of chirping in the study. There, wedged behind the couch, we found Charlie, who had returned to us at last.

His homecoming was celebrated with a long-distance phone call to David, who had been notified when Charlie went missing.

Charlie lived with us for several years, filling our home with his songs. One hot summer day, we left the air conditioning on while we were out of the house, and Charlie died from over-exposure to the chilled air. We buried him in the back yard, beside the bird of paradise.

My husband was not the first in his family to recognize the spiritual qualities of animals and birds. Rottenberg family lore tells of a schochet who once remarked to his Rebbe that a cluster of birds in a tree outside the window of the House of Study were gilgulim of ancient scholars who wished to continue learning. The Rebbe paled and sternly admonished the schochet, forbidding him from slaughtering any animal or bird. The Rebbe ordered the schochet to resign from his job at once and become instead a teacher. This he did, becoming a reknowned *melamed*, teaching many students with sensitivity and insight.

Jewish Los Angeles

Sacred History in the City of Angels

We never did quite recreate the vanished world of our Hasidic past in the City of Angels, though that was always my dream. My unattainable goal. My husband never aspired to be a Rebbe, though many people considered him theirs. On the contrary, he shunned the public limelight and the politics of synagogue life.

He wanted to meet each person face-to-face, to hear the formulation of the question, to plumb the depths for answers.

His reticence perplexed me. He clothed the light of his soul in garments of anonymity. How the world needs his light after the great darkness, I anguished. But I held my tongue, weeping silently in the night for those who were destroyed, even as I saw the next generation leaving the pale remnant of American Jewish faith.

Could European Hasidism ever be recreated in America, I wondered. Was it after all such an unrealistic goal? Yes, and no.

I never gave up, and in his own way, neither did my husband. Slowly, after many false beginnings, we created a congregation which honored the Holy Sabbath day, the Torah and their Rabbi.

We agreed never to embarrass anyone, not if they showed up two hours late for lunch, nor for the way they dressed, and above all, never for the questions they asked.

"Each precious soul contains a spark of the divine," Ephraim maintained. "With our help, that spark can be ignited into a strong and steady flame of faith."

It was above all the young people, many of whom were children of Holocaust survivors, who gave the greatest meaning to our work. They brought us their burning questions and their deepest doubts. The post-Holocaust generation wanted to know how an omnipotent G-d could have permitted the Holocaust to happen; how is it possible for Jewish belief to continue? They were asking questions to which there are no answers, questions they could not ask their own parents for fear of causing too much pain. They came to us because they saw we would not let Hitler have the victory of stealing our faith from us, and because with us they could ask every possible question and receive a well-considered answer.

"These youngsters are looking everywhere for spiritual answers," Ephraim often lamented. "Everywhere but in Yiddishkeit." He rejoiced whenever one of them found their way to us.

Upon spotting a newcomer entering the synagogue, Ephraim's face lit up. Jumping up from his seat of honor on the *bima*, he would hurry over to greet the newcomer, offer him a prayer shawl, show him which page we were on in the prayer book. Invariably, his enthusiastic welcome of these young people included an invitation to our house for lunch after services.

What discussions took place at our Sabbath table! Whether it was philosophy or physics, psychoanalysis or comparative religion, mysticism or kabbalah, no subject was too esoteric. The inquiring young minds were delighted and surprised by my husband's responses, which were at once informed by modern inquiry and yet steeped in Hasidic learning.

Once, at a wedding, Ephraim met a young man, and asked, as he always did, "Who are you?" This question, never rhetorical, caused people to search their souls before replying.

"I'm David Fox," the young man answered.

"And what do you do?" Ephraim wanted to know.

"I am a Rabbi and also a psychologist."

"Are you a Freudian or a Jungian?" Ephraim continued.

Surprised, the young man looked at the Hassidic scholar in silk caftan and shtreimel, whose bright blue eyes were blazing intensely into his.

"I work as a Rabbi and also as a clinician," he responded, wondering how this old-world Rabbi knew of Freud, Jung and modern psychology.

"You know," Ephraim said, taking the young man's hands into his in a double handshake, "I read a fascinating insight in the introduction to a book on the

Zohar called *Zohar Chai*, by Rav Isaac of Komarna. In the introduction, some illumination is offered regarding the deep, psychological differences between people, and how these are manifest within both the symbols and the rituals we observe.

An astonishing discussion ensued, and often, during the years that followed, the Rabbi-psychologist made use of this understanding when counseling his clients.

People from all walks of life and from every denomination came to our table, where Ephraim presided, impeccably attired, light pouring from his face and into their hearts. Dr. Rabbi David Lieber, the Dean of the Conservative movement's University of Judaism in Los Angeles, brought his children to my husband for his blessing before each Bar Mitzvah and wedding. "He respected the traditions of others without compromising his own," Dr. Lieber said of Ephraim's way of receiving visitors and guests. The Liebers brought the great Talmudic scholar, Rabbi Saul Lieberman, a Litvak whose analytic approach to Judaism eschewed mysticism, to our Shabbat table. Rabbi Lieberman exclaimed later: "I never imagined I could experience so much pleasure and warmth at a Rebbe's Tisch." Later, Rabbi Lieberman told us a rumor was circulating at his synagogue in New York that he had become a hasid!

I asked Rabbi Lieberman how he, an Orthodox Jew, reconciled his affiliation with the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary.

"It is a privilege to work there," the great scholar replied. "They give me all the time I need for my work. Without the support of the Seminary, I could never have accomplished all that I have, never completed the translations or written my books." My cousin, Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel, was another scholar who taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary, without compromising his Orthodox lifestyle. Indeed, these venerable scholars succeeded in influencing many of their students in becoming Sabbath observers.

Although my husband was proud when I earned my academic degree from California's University of Judaism, he declined offers to join their teaching faculty. He was willing to teach students who came to his office, but was

unwilling to risk expulsion from the Agudah Orthodox Union were he to accept an on-site teaching position in the Conservative Movement.

Students did flock to him. We loved these earnest young people who found their way to us. They came from every possible background.

Once, just before Passover, I got a phone call from Avraham Sutton, one of our young friends. He had fifteen guests he needed places for at Seder. Of course I said yes. We fit in those fifteen young people. Ephraim sat, resplendent in his silk robe, reclining upon the pillow with the special, white satin pillowcase which was used only for the Seder. It was an unforgettable evening for our young guests, who were overwhelmed by the beauty of the table and the depth of the discussion. From that evening came two marriages. Mimi Schechter and Mordechai Gess were at our Seder that night, and later they married in our shule. My granddaughter, Malka, served as flower girl. Today they live in Moshav Me'or Modi'in in Israel with their seven children. Avraham Sutton, today a leading translator of sacred texts, lives in the outskirts of Jerusalem with his wife, Esther, and their eight children.

There was a group called "Ohr Chadash," a kind of Jewish university without walls. Dr. Josh Ritchie, Rabbi Joe Schonwald, David Montag, Chuck Vernoff and Avraham Sutton were among those who used to study Hasidism with my husband in his study. We hosted Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach when he came to Los Angeles, and his concerts in our synagogue drew enthusiastic crowds of youngsters who later returned for further study and spiritual guidance.

When our neighbors, the Bronners, moved to Los Angeles from South Africa, a special bond formed between Leila, the mother, a young woman with a PHD in Jewish philosophy, and my husband. They would sit together for hours. Leila was struck by my husband's stately appearance, by the way his face seemed to beam with light. As she came to know him better, she realised that his beaming face expressed his joy in being occupied at all times with the service of G-d, praying and studying.

At our Yom Tov table, Ephraim spoke of the Hasidic world that is no more. He described the great Rabbis of his native Hungary and his joy when sitting in

their presence as a youth. He never hid his torment at the enigma of the Holocaust which brought our world to an end, yet he was able to transmit to our young friends that "post-Holocaust Jewish existence can have meaning only in the belief that Jewish history is sacred history, that Jewish existence is of cosmic importance... a force for human redemption."

Whenever my cousins, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Sylvia came to town, they were our honored guests for Shabbat meals and long evenings of conversation. Sylvia was from Los Angeles, and her parents were members of our congregation. Our young friends filled our living room with their eager faces and questions.

Heschel's book on Shabbat was immensely popular, especially with our young friends, who plied him with questions. How is faith rekindled after the Holocaust? How can a G-d of compassion and justice permit evil to exist? How can our sacred deeds create a more just and compassionate world?

During the years of the Civil Rights and anti- Viet Nam War movements, Jewish responses to the burning issues of the day were discussed within the framework of Jewish observance and philosophy.

Although consensus was rarely achieved, the graciousness and tolerance of our home were as appealing to the young people as the erudition and profound knowledge of philosophy and history which they found within it.

Professor Chuck Vernoff was one of our regulars. In the late sixties, newly Sabbath-observing, he came to our synagogue because it was close to his parent's home. After services, while engaged in conversation with my husband, he mentioned he was studying at the University of Chicago.

"Are you by any chance studying with Professor Eliade?" Ephraim asked.

Chuck almost fainted. Professor Mircea Eliade's name is generally only recognized by academics studying comparative religion. How, he wondered, did this Hasidic Rabbi, in a tailored, black silk coat and trim white beard, know of his professor?

Chuck came regularly to our home, often bringing other young people with him. Eager to learn, they sat in Ephraim's study for hours, plying him with questions, listening to anecdotes about the vanished world of European Hasidism. Fascinated, they vicariously entered the mystical realms of my husband and his forebears. They were in awe of my husband, whom they regarded as an aristocrat. His physical beauty and his command of the English language put them at ease. They were amazed at the phenomenal breadth of his general and historic knowledge, combined with the depth of his rabbinic learning.

They loved how accessible he was to them, his genuine interest in everything and in everyone. They admired his childlike spontaneity and the passion of his convictions. They came again and again to learn from him, filling our home with the joy of learning.

Over the years, whenever Chuck - or "Yishaiah," as we called him by his Hebrew name - was in town, he would come to visit. My husband would mentor him, prodding him to finish his doctoral thesis and to publish his articles. They would discuss the fine points and details of his research, and Ephraim always had ideas about other rabbinic sources to consult for documentation.

Ephraim officiated at the funeral of Chuck's mother. Now, whenever he visits Los Angeles, he has a place at my Sabbath table.

Invariably, there were rough edges in rabbinic discourse in Los Angeles. Rabbis from one side of the spectrum did not speak to Rabbis at the other. But when it came to my husband, all discourse was possible. At community functions, Ephraim would be surrounded by all manner of people and every rabbinic denomination. They all considered him to be a scholar and a gentleman. Rabbi Kraus considered him to be "a window" into the lost world of Hasidism. Rabbi Elijah Schochet thought of him as a "passageway," because through him, others were permitted to enter the world of the past.

The Rabbis found in Ephraim a living example of Hasidism at its finest; not superficial external trappings, but inner authenticity and deep spirituality. Over the years, many friendships were forged between my husband and other

Rabbis in the community. They loved him for his universalistic scholarship integrated with rabbinic and mystical teachings. His greatest treasure was his library. He knew every book intimately, and could always find the source material for every topic of discussion. They loved him for his "Torah Shebalev," his Torahs of the heart.

It was Ephraim's custom to recite the Hallel prayers on Israel's Independence Day, in commemoration of the great miracle that after two thousand years of exile and persecution, we finally have a Jewish homeland. One year, one of our visitors left the sanctuary in the midst of the prayers. When Ephraim saw him later in the street, he asked the man why he had left so abruptly.

"I can never pray in your synagogue again," the man, a Satmar Hasid, answered.

Appalled, Ephraim lamented the man's lack of understanding. If only there had been a State of Israel in the 1930's, how many lives might have been saved, including those of his own children... How can the modern State of Israel, achieved against all odds, be considered as anything less than divine intervention?

The escalating dissent and venomous intolerance between the various streams of Jews was a matter of grave concern to my husband and to me.

When he heard that "ultra-Orthodox" youth on Bar Ilan Street in Jerusalem were hurling stones at cars driven on the Sabbath, he sadly said: "they should be blowing kisses, not throwing rocks."

Ephraim's outreach occurred wherever he went.

Once, in Jerusalem, he was accosted at an intersection on Shabbat by some non-religious youth in a car.

"How much did the fur hat cost?" one of the youngsters taunted him, eyeing Ephraim's shtreimel and silk kaftan with derision.

Ephraim smiled broadly and walked over to the driver's window.

"Thank you for complimenting my Sabbath attire," he responded. "Every bit of the cost was worth it to me, for these clothes bring honor to the Sabbath Day."

"Shabbat Shalom," the puzzled youth wished him in amazement as they drove away.

We were to spiritually "adopt" many of the people we met, including many young Rabbis and students, who became as dear to us as though they were our own children.

Once they entered our door, we helped with all their needs, both spiritual and material, building up a community of caring souls. The musician, Neil Seidell, his wife, Patricia, and their daughters, Reba and Carla, spent many Shabbat afternoons and holidays with us.

Ephraim's happiest moments were spent with fellow philosophers, like Professor Zev Falk, with whom we met in Jerusalem and in Los Angeles. Each discussion would begin where they left off. Professor Falk's charming European manners, German pronunciation and thoughtful phrases always endeared him. "How does the Rabbi always know which page in which book to turn to?" he asked me in amazement one afternoon as I prepared tea. "It is simply uncanny! He knows every book in his vast library. Each page in those books is as familiar to him as though he had written the words himself."

Sacred history is made as we sit around the dining room table discussing our lives in the light of sacred texts. The Torah discussions, enlivened by Hasidic explanations and parables, enter a wordless realm when we sing. Those precious melodies bridge heaven and earth on the Sabbath day. Wherever Jews gather to honor the Sabbath Day, sacred history is made, whether in Madrid or Monsey, the Holy City or the City of Angels.

Reflections

Whenever I see small children cuddled in their mothers' arms, a pang of regret seizes me. Sadly, I remember my own son's childhood, which was so violently disrupted by the war. In our deportation, we lacked even the most basic necessities, and the normal routines of child-rearing were disrupted by the harsh conditions in which we struggled to survive. I had to leave my baby with others while I went to work. For each precious moment of closeness we did not share, I wonder how different our lives might have been...

To be sure, there were many times when I held my son close. Huddled in the cellar, listening to the bombs fall, he snuggled against my heart, blissfully unaware of the danger as I prayed for our safety. I tended him as he hovered between life and death when ill with typhoid. Kissing his cheeks, whispering to him, *I love you, my baby...*"

Remembering, I am tormented by regret. I gave all that I could to my son, but was it enough? Eventually, he left the path of Hasidism which was his legacy for a broader world. Were his wartime ordeals to blame? Was it the seductive appeal of the American dream?

People who work with child survivors note the difficulties they often have with self-expression. This is so true of David, who never cried during the years we were in Mogilev. Perhaps, because he was malnourished, he simply lacked the physical strength. Or maybe he sensed that our very survival hinged on his silence. Everyone who knew of my son remarked on how good he was, such a quiet child. After the war, we had to take him for speech therapy. It was difficult to make him speak above a whisper. To express himself loudly as normal children do would have been unthinkable.

When the inmates of other concentration camps were liberated and began their trek homeward, a ragged band of survivors suddenly appeared one day in the streets of Mogilev. Still clad in their striped prison garb, they shuffled, barefoot and gaunt with hunger, through the icy streets, leaving bloodstains in the snow. David was three years old at the time. Watching through the window as I frantically searched for morsels of bread to offer the pitiful band of stragglers in front of me, my son asked: "Mutti, who are these people?"

"These are our brothers," I replied. "They are Jews."

Horried, he continued to observe the scene before us. "If these are Jews," he finally concluded, "then I don't want to be a Jew."

Had my child survived only to conclude that it was too dangerous, too painful to be Jewish?

As his thirteenth birthday approached, we hired a photographer to take David's picture for his Bar Mitzvah invitation. It was a sunny afternoon, and David wanted to be out riding his bicycle, or playing baseball with the other boys of the neighborhood. Instead, dressed in a suit, he posed with a volume of the Talmud open in front of him. We had to prod him to smile.

When David grew older, we sent him to Ner Israel yeshiva in Baltimore, where he studied for three years. We couldn't afford to bring him home for the holidays. He returned only during the summer break. He dutifully wrote to us at the beginning of each week. I eagerly anticipated his letters, which always arrived in time for the Sabbath. We would read them just before candle-lighting, appreciating his commentaries about the texts he was studying. He wrote how much he missed us. I sent care packages to him, baking special cookies each month and shipping them to him. He shared them with the other boys. A taste of home. He was a promising student, with a good head for Talmud. He will become a great Rabbi, we dreamed. But it was not to be.

In Baltimore, he studied in the yeshiva during the day and completed his high school degree at night school in the evenings. After three years, he moved on to Yeshiva University in New York, where he continued his religious studies and began to also study psychology and other subjects. A new world began to open up for David, and he began to rebel, as all teenagers do, wanting to carve out an identity for himself separate from his parents' expectations.

He wanted a secular as well as religious education, and eventually he returned to California and enrolled in UCLA, studying psychology and law.

It was painful watching him fall away from the Hasidic world we were trying to rebuild. My husband, who had lost two young sons in the Holocaust, put his heart into the fatherly mission of raising David. He adopted him, giving him his name, his affection, and his unconditional love.

In the Hasidic world, the defection of a young man from the tight-knit, religious community to the wider, secular world is often perceived as a tragedy. I vowed not to let my disappointment with the path my son was following interfere with our love. As my husband wisely advised: "we should take a different attitude." We decided to focus on the abundant goodness and kindness of our son. In any case, as we have often sadly noted, one's level of religious observance is not necessarily an accurate measure of character. One day, David might return to being a Torah scholar. We would wait and see.

David met Harlene, a Canadian girl studying interior design, and brought her home to meet us. She was not from a Hasidic, or even Sabbath- observing home. I worried that she would not keep a kosher home for my son, and we discussed this.

"Do not worry, Mother," she respectfully reassured me. "We will keep the commandments."

And so they were married. We made a pre-nuptial reception for them in Los Angeles, with a thousand guests and two bands playing music. The wedding was in Vancouver. Soon I was presented with my first grandchild, Malka, named for my mother. Holding the tiny, blond haired, blue-eyed angel baby in my arms, inhaling her sweet fragrance, I felt an immense joy. With my grand daughter, I relaxed into that precious closeness which I had missed, during the war, with my son. I sang to her every song I remembered, and made up dozens more.

There are so many moments in my life which I do not want to remember, painful moments. I do not remember what I fed my baby on the train which deported us to Mogilev. I simply do not remember. There are other moments which I cannot forget, which will never be erased from my heart.

What happiness, whenever our grand daughters came to visit us! My husband would clasp both his hands on his heart, close his eyes, and say "*Oy, meine Kinder...*"

For a few years, David and Harlene returned to Canada to live near her family. How I missed my Malkale. I visited whenever I could. I was so happy when they returned to California, and another granddaughter was born, Alisa.

My love for my grand daughters fills my heart. I watch them grow up, each girl precious in her own way. Malka is practical and tidy, Alisa is poetic and creative. Both are sensitive, loving and caring, a joy to be with.

When Malka reached the age of Bat Mitzvah, we made an unforgettable, champagne luncheon for her. It was a Sunday afternoon in May. Malka had prepared a d'var Torah with her grandfather, which she delivered eloquently. I was studying at the University of Judaism, and all my professors came, Dr. Lieber and Dr. Lubliner.

In one's lifetime, there are always regrets, disappointments, and worries. There are moments of anguish and heart-break. Each of those bitter moments has a flip side of blessing, in which one feels the ongoing closeness of G-d. "Baruch Hashem," I always say, when I perceive the hidden blessing nestled beside the pain.

David is a devoted son, a good provider for his family and a conscientious Jew. He embodies the most noble character traits of hesed (loving-kindness) and tzedaka (righteousness and generosity.)

Today Malka lives in Tel Aviv, and Alisa in New York. They are talented, well-educated, and loving young women. I pray that they will find their life partners, and that I will live to dance at their weddings and some day hold their children in my arms.

A Torah Dedication in Monsey

In 1941, my brother, Aaron visited me after checking on the Torah scroll our parents had commissioned. When the bombings began, he was unable to return home. We survived the war together, while the rest of our family perished. For many years, my brother was burning with a desire to finish the task our parents had entrusted to him. He commissioned a Torah scroll to be written in memory of our family. When it was finally finished, a dedication ceremony took place at the Skvirer Rebbe's Yeshiva in Monsey.

The old Skvirer Rebbe, a Twersky, lived in Yasse before the war, where I spent many pleasant summers as a youth. During the war, he moved his family to Bucharest. They were never deported. Our first contact was when I arrived in Bucharest after liberation. He was my parent's age. His son is now the Skvirer Rav in Monsey, and his daughter married the Vishnitzer Rav, the son of the Rabbi of Brashow.

Their daughter's wedding was the first family simcha after the war ended. At that first rejoicing, I felt numb, like a stone. Sadly, after the wedding the bride got sick and despite my efforts to obtain penicillin for her, she died. The groom later married her sister, who is now the Vishnitzer Rebbetzin in Monsey. They have sixteen children. Two of their children married into my husband, Ephraim's family.

The Shabbos of the Torah dedication in Monsey was a great event for our family. All my brother's children and grandchildren gathered to celebrate the Sabbath together. His daughters, Malka, Rivka and Aviva, with their husbands and children, and his son, Baruch and his family. To see these beautiful, accomplished, and precious neices and nephews all together, gladdened my heart.

On Saturday night, when the Rebbe receives his Hasidim, who come for his blessing, we also waited our turn to see the Rebbe. My brother and his children

and twenty-three grandchildren visited the Rebbe for his brocho (blessing.) Then I went in, alone.

Last time I saw the Rebbe, he was a five year-old child in Bucharest just after the war. Now, a reknowned leader with his own large family, he beckoned me into his office. Standing respectfully in front of his table, I began to tell him stories about his grandmother, the previous Skvirer Rebbetzin.

I will never forget how the great Rebbe bent his head to kiss his old mother's hand. They had disagreed about something, and it was time to reconcile. I described it to the Rebbe, standing erect in front of his table. He asked me to be seated. Tears came to my eyes, and I said to him : "Rabbi, you carry the *midos* (courteous manners) of your father, may his memory be blessed. The last time I saw your father, I stood in front of him with my holy husband in New York. Your father stood up and brought us chairs, saying: "a family member does not have to stand in front of me, please sit.' I am happy to see that the manners of this great man have been passed on to his son."

He asked me many questions about Hasidic life before the war and we continued speaking until we became aware that many people were still waiting outside. I stood up to leave.

"Rabbi," I said, "Until now, we have socialized, but now I must ask for your blessing."

His blessing filled me with strength. I am a great believer in the power of rabbinical blessings. I remember the blessings of his father, the previous Rebbe. "Nu, nu, nu," he would sing in his gentle, soothing voice. What a powerful source of comfort in every utterance, in each "nu, nu."

In Monsey, I also visited the Vishnitzer Rebbetzin, my childhood friend, whom I hadn't seen since we were in Bucharest, after the war. Like her brother, she showed me great kindness, accompanying me down all the stairs to the taxi.

Sunday morning, the final letters of the Torah were inscribed, and 1500 students, small and grown, joined in procession behind the Rebbe, who carried the Torah through the huge synagogue, with much dancing and singing.

Watching this event, a jumble of emotions surge in my heart. Sad memories of our parents, sister and brother who perished. Now this Torah in their memory brings a sense of continuity and completion.

During the war, we found two Torah scrolls, in a hole in the wall of our uncle's home in Mogilev. One, ripped by the Germans, had to be buried in the *Geniza* of the Jewish cemetery. The other accompanied us all the way to America, and was given to my husband's nephew's yeshiva, Ohr Molay, in New York.

Two Torah scrolls, one old, one new, in the land which has blessed us with safe harbor. Each precious letter of the Torah is a world unto itself. I, too, have a letter in the Torah scroll, the letter Chet, for Chana.

Mama, watching above us, must surely be smiling through her tears at the sight these beautiful Jewish children dancing and singing in her memory. May her memory, and that of Father, Shimon and Rivka, bless us always.

A Journey to Kleimberdein

In a yellowed envelope, in Ephraim's desk drawer, nestled among his papers, a photograph of a beautiful young woman and two blond-haired little boys. His first wife. Their two young sons. He never showed me this photograph, never spoke to me of them. But I recognized them at once.

Sitting in his chair, examining the photograph of the woman who bore his children, I wonder about the silence we held about her. Why, during half a century, did we never speak of her? Another envelope in the drawer yields a letter, written in German, from a friend of his. The letter informs Ephraim that his children were gassed the day they arrived in Auschwitz, but his wife survived.

On the day of her liberation, she was given food, ate, fell ill with typhus and died soon thereafter.

I phone my husband's brother, Yiddel, and break the silence, asking about this woman, my husband's first wife. He tells me that she was a Czechoslovakian cousin, also of the Kossin dynasty. When Ephraim fell in love with her before their betrothal, his parents disapproved of their marriage. When Ephraim left for America in 1938, he intended to send for her and their sons, but her mother wouldn't let her leave Europe. She stayed behind, and perished.

When I think how the Jews of Kleimberdein were deported a few days after Shavuos, in June, 1944, I cannot even begin to fathom this gruesome craziness. How can it be that they were taken to concentration camp after I was already liberated? What an incomprehensible, chaotic world we inhabited, everything a game of chance, this one spared, that one condemned.

Ephraim was plagued by recurring dreams in which he heard the screams of his children, the cries of the murdered Jewish children. I urged him to return to Hungary for a visit, and so we made that difficult voyage into a once familiar landscape peopled by strangers. As we walked down the street in Budapest, Ephraim looked into the eyes of all the passersby to see whom he recognized. People would stop and talk to him. "What is your name?" he would ask. "Where are you from? Did you know this or that person?" In this way, he was able to learn the fates of many of the people he knew.

We hired a car and driver to take us for the day to his hometown and to the cemeteries where the righteous are buried in nearby villages. In the cemeteries, we lit candles and recited psalms for the souls of the dead. As he stood in the street in front of his childhood home, now inhabited by non-Jews, he began to tremble. "To think of the hundreds of holy children who visited us here," he sighed as we looked at the modest building. "All of them gone now."

He pointed to the place where they built their sukkah each year and recalled his holy uncle, the Kossiner Rav, his master, who lived in Kossin. On his last Succoth in Europe, he went to Kossin to visit his uncle and say goodbye. At the conclusion of the holiday, his uncle was preparing to leave the tabernacle of the

sukkah by walking around in it and kissing each part - the decorations, the window vents of the wooden walls.

Ephraim felt sad that night. It was his last holiday in Hungary. Soon he would be leaving for America. As he left the Sukkah, he turned around for a last look. Suddenly he gasped and grabbed the arm of his friend, Reb Moshe.

"Do you see what I see?" he whispered, not believing his eyes.

"Yes," his friend replied. "There is a halo of light around the Rebbe's head."

Indeed it was so. The Kossiner Rav stood with an aura of light illuminating his holy face, and both men gazed at their master, etching his face forever into memory.

Every Passover and every Succoth, Ephraim remembered his uncle the Kossiner Rav. Every day, after the war ended, he went to the Jewish Community Center to examine the new lists of names of survivors. Every day he returned home, dejected. The names of his wife and children did not appear. One day, he was standing at a bus stop fearing the dreadful truth. "Why bother going on?" he thought. "What good does it do to put on *tefillin* and obey the *mitzvot*, to walk the path of tradition, when in the end is only death, the death of the holy, the innocent and the pure."

The Kossiner Rav appeared to Ephraim then, in his moment of great despair, a vision of his saintly face glowing with a supernal halo in the sukkah. "Be courageous and continue your mission on the path of your holy ancestors," his uncle told him. Ephraim knew then that he must go on and continue on the path of holiness- there could be no other response.

Fifty years later, there is hardly a trace of the Jewish population which once flourished in Kleimberdein. A plaque on the wall of the synagogue records the names of those who died in the Holocaust. The cemetery is overgrown with ivy and weeds, its tombstones so covered with soot and smoke that it is nearly impossible to read the names of those buried there. The old flour mill has only two walls standing.

Before our visit, my husband used to have many disturbing dreams. Afterwards, the dreams ceased. In just such a way, the memories which surface now as I write are beginning to heal me, in my loneliness. For this I am thankful.

Alas, we were unable to have more children of our own, but that didn't stop us from "adopting" many of the young people who came to us for Sabbaths and holidays. Ephraim said they were our spiritual children. Sometimes I would see him looking at the youngsters, with an aching hunger in his eyes. Once, when we were traveling, he followed a little boy, having put his carry-on bag on the luggage cart on top of our suitcases. When he returned a moment later, the bag was gone. It cost \$3,000 to replace his tallith and two sets of *tefilin*.

From Ephraim, I learned the traditions and melodies of the Kosin dynasty, which became as dear to me as the familiar customs of my childhood home, where there was a different melody for each holiday kiddush, according to the Chernobyl - Twersky tradition. There was a bittersweet joy learning the songs and customs of my husband's ancestors.

The Kosin Hasidim had the beautiful custom of blowing shofar on Hoshana Rabba. The shofar was sounded as the men circled the sanctuary waving the bundled *lulav* branches. Not done in my family, this striking observance created a meaningful opening for me into my husband's legacy.

The Kosin Hasidim also had unusual wedding customs. At the wedding, they erected two bridal canopies. One was for the wedding party, the other for the souls of the ancestors. Their wedding rings were square on the outside, round on the inside, according to a Zoharic tradition.

Ephraim always wept at the Passover Seder when we came to the "*Nishmat Kol Chai*." He cried because witnesses had told him how his uncle, the Kosiner Rebbe, sang "*Nishmat Kol Chai*" as he entered the crematoria. "Let every soul and every breath proclaim the blessings of G-d." As he gave his soul to his Maker, he blessed Him with his last breath.

"That is the way of the righteous," Ephraim taught. "The greatness of a man, even when he sees his end, to proclaim his faith."

In the train which carried him to Auschwitz, the Kosiner Rav was beseeched by his fellow traveler's to bless them. One who survived was told: "You will be in hell, but then you will live in the Garden of Eden," and so it was. His year in Auschwitz was Hell. Today he is a prosperous man with a beautiful family.

When my husband saw my sorrow during his illness, before he fell into his coma, he chided me, asking why I was sad. "Go home," he urged me. "Change into a different dress, then come back to me."

But I could not leave his side. Not then, as he was slipping away from me. How often I relive those moments in the hospital, when I saw more than the doctors could discern, noticing every nuance and change.

Since my husband's death, I have also lost other dear ones. My sister-in-law, Coka, my best friend, Celia. I mourn for them in my notebook, telling my beloved. I hear him advising me to be courageous, to carry on, to walk straight and keep my head up.

I wonder what I should do with his library. Rabbis come to me to ask for it to be donated to their yeshivas. But I cannot bear to part with the precious books we purchased and studied from together, not yet. I wait for the right time.

Every decision is difficult for me, now that he is no longer with me to discuss the pros and cons. I decide one way, reconsider. Act. Decide not to act. I hesitate and wrestle with the options. I wish for his advice. His reassurance. His arms encircling me, reminding me I am loved and cherished.

I take refuge in prayer, every morning and again in the afternoon. I never miss my *tehillim*, the psalms which comfort and strengthen me. As I study and pray, G-d infuses me with renewed courage and faith.

On Sunday mornings, a group of women come to my house to learn Mishna Torah from the Rambam. I choose the selections I teach carefully, finding chapters which fit into our daily life.

I used to sit with Ephraim and learn the parsha of the week before dinner on Friday nights. We had our own, special study session together. Sometimes we would learn from the "Meor Eynayim," the writings of my holy ancestor, Rabbi Menachem Nahum of Chernobyl. He taught that the dark must precede the light, and then the coming of the light will uplift it.

In just such a way, I am now beginning to see the times of great darkness in my life as a prelude to the light which lifted me up afterwards.

How grateful I am to all those who came, bringing the sparks of their own light into my darkness. When my husband was ill in the hospital, Tamara came from Jerusalem and Nira came from far away to be with me, sitting up long into the night, singing and praying with me. During his long illness, and later, during the shiva, so many friends came or called, each precious friend removing a bit of the darkness and replacing it with their light.

If I have any regrets, it is that I spent so much time in business, and not with my husband. How I adored him, cherishing each moment we spent together. After we gave the shule to the Yeshiva Gedola and sold the Galilee House, we enjoyed our retirement years, which were the best of our life. We traveled all over the world from *simcha* to *simcha*. A Bar Mitzvah and a wedding in Peru, a wedding in Rio de Janeiro, visits to Argentina, Spain, Belgium, and France. We bought and furnished our apartment in Jerusalem, celebrating the holidays with our relatives and friends.

We divided our year between Jerusalem and Los Angeles, spending the holidays in the Holy City. Once, we met chief Rabbi Shapiro in the sukkah of the Renaissance Hotel, where we were spending the holiday of Sukkot.

"Rebbetzin, where do you live?" he asked me.

"I dwell in Los Angeles," I replied, "but I live in Jerusalem."

"Ah," he sighed in satisfaction. "What you say is a gem of wisdom. There, you exist, but in Israel, you live."

Now when I come to Jerusalem, despite the fact that I am alone in my apartment, I feel my husband's presence with me. I keep a candle burning on his desk. A candle for his soul.

During the years when Ephraim was alive, I was forbidden by Jewish law from visiting the grave of my first husband. Now that they both are gone, I am permitted. So I go, to Haifa, to the cemetery where so many of my dear ones are buried, and among them, Dr. Stein, who died so young. After the war, his body was brought to Israel from Bucharest, where he died.

It is peaceful in the cemetery. There are very few people about, and the ones who are there do not bother each other. The stone on his grave is black marble. This great man belonged to me for such a short time. I am so overcome by sadness at his grave that I can barely read the words from the book of psalms. Instead, I speak to him, a kaddish in my own words. How can it be that he has been lying here all these years? His sisters, Rosa and Coka, are buried nearby, with Coka's husband, Yoel Karpel. Among their neighbors are our friends, the Motzkins, Dr. Theodore and Naomi, and his parents, who were at the right hand of Herzl and who founded the town of Kiryat Motzkin near Haifa.

The memories wash over me. Professor Motzkin was one of the world's greatest mathematicians. For many years, he taught at UCLA. There, we became friends, and their sons were all welcome in our home. The youngest, Gabriel, used to sleep on our floor when he came for Yom Kippur.

On Jerusalem Day, I watch the military parade as it passes beneath my balcony. How proud I feel to see these thousands of young soldiers who are our children, marching, handsome in their uniforms, in firm, steady steps to the music. Jewish youngsters, defending our homeland.

Suddenly I cannot bear to watch by myself, and I go down to the sidewalk to join the people gathered there. Three beautiful young Yemenite girls are standing

on the curb. After the parade, I invite them upstairs for refreshments. The girls, high school students, came to Jerusalem from Herziliya for the parade.

It is Israel's 50th birthday, the Jubilee Year. A time to rejoice. To think that I have lived to see the remnant of our people living in the Land of Israel, strong and proud, with an army to defend itself.

Mama taught me that one mitzvah leads to another, and it is so true. When I invite guests into my apartment, I am renewed and refreshed by their presence. When I bring new skirts to my aunt, old and frail and all alone in the world, I emerge feeling younger and more vital. "*Al tashlicheyni b'eyt zikna*," the adage commands: "Do not abandon me in my old age..." My dear aunt, Tanta Rachel, Mama's baby sister, blesses me for my kindness.

And so may I bless all of you, dear readers. May you walk in the ways of Torah and Mitzvoth all the days of your life, always feeling the sustaining *Yad Hashem* - the Hand of G-d. May you be blessed with goodness, kindness and health. Please come visit me when you are in Los Angeles or Jerusalem.

If the story of my life has touched a kernel of truth in yours, then I am very happy to have had your company along the way.

